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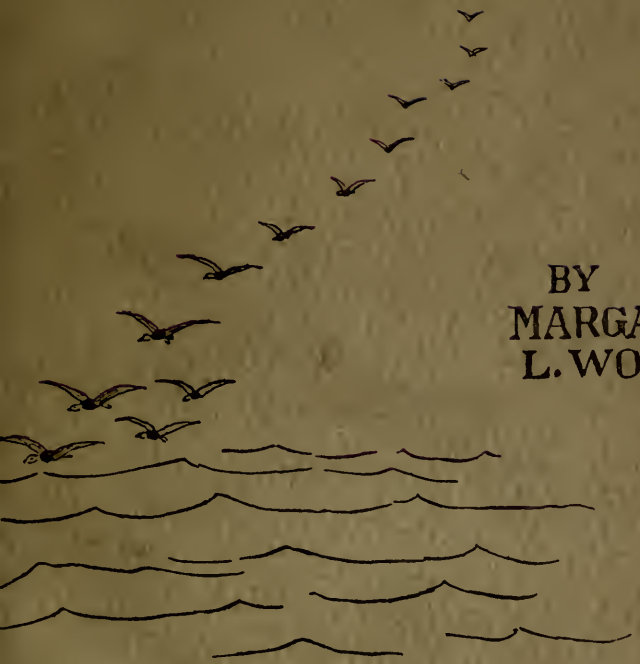
WILD·JUSTICE
A DRAMATIC POEM



BY
MARGARET
L. WOODS

SMITH.
ELDER & CO.
LONDON
1896

WILD JUSTICE

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BY

MARGARET L. WOODS

AUTHOR OF 'A VILLAGE TRAGEDY' 'LYRICS AND BALLADS'
'THE VAGABONDS' ETC.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1896

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PREFACE

In explanation of the circumstances of the following dramatic poem, it may be necessary to state that light-houses could formerly be erected by private individuals, who were then empowered by Act of Parliament to raise dues on all ships passing them. That on the Skerries was in private hands so late as the year 1841.

The scene is laid on Ynys yr Unigdra off the Welsh coast, in the early years of this century. The island is in an estuary and is surrounded by quicksands, except on one side, where the channel of a river, deep but not wide, divides it from a small island of rock and firm sand. The two islands are connected by a wooden footbridge. Across the mouth of the river and the greater part of the estuary runs a bar of sand, dry at low tide and covered at high. The bar is separated from Ynys yr Unigdra by a belt of quicksand, but from the smaller island, where the sands are firm, it can be easily reached at low tide.

1 OCT 1922

Ty Mawr is a grey, gaunt house, with straggling out-buildings. In front is a square garden with narrow paved walks, enclosed by a low stone wall; behind, some rising ground, and a wood of stunted oaks. It is separated only by a bare field from the shore, and looks out to sea over the quicksand and the bar. To the right the bay ends in a steep headland with some isolated rocks jutting out beyond it, on the largest one of which (Craig y Gwr) stands a recently built lighthouse. To the left is a wider extent of estuary, and in the distance a rocky coast backed by mountains. There are a few cottages on the island, but they are all on the other side. The action takes place principally in two rooms at Ty Mawr, both on the first floor; the great parlour and an inner room leading out of it. Both have windows towards the sea.

NOTE

I am indebted for the first lines of the Ballad in this play to the following two lines, quoted in *Wuthering Heights*:

It was far in the night and the bairnies grat,
The mither beneath the mools heard that.

PERSONAGES.

GRYFFITH GWYLLIM.

MRS. GWYLLIM, *his wife.*

OWAIN, *a cripple*
NELTO (ELLEN)
SHONNIN (JOHN)
A BABY
} *their children.*

[DAVID, LUCY, *and other* GWYLLIM *children, who do not appear.*]

WILD JUSTICE

SCENE I

The inner room at Ty Mawr. NELTO *with a baby in her arms.*

Nelto [*singing*].

In the dead of the night the children were weeping.
The mother heard that where she lay sleeping,
And scratched at the coffin lid.

The shrill of the lark, the scream of the owl,
The dogs that bark, and the storms that howl—
She never had heard them where she lay hid,
But she heard her poor little children weeping.

Enter SHONNIN *carrying books.*

Nelto. Home from school already?

Shonnin [*throwing down his books*]. Where's mother?

Nelto. The Vicar's over here to-day, and she's gone to see him.

Shonnin. What for?

Nelto. For the same reason that she went last Saturday to see our dear cousin at the Port.

Shonnin. But he's a lawyer. How can the parson help us?

Nelto. He could at least find out if there's no law in England that will help us. O Shonnin! Fancy if mother and all of us could go away and live somewhere where we should never, never see father again!

Shonnin. We will when I've earned money enough.

Nelto. But can we? Ah! there she is, coming in at the garden gate.

Shonnin [*leaning out of the window*]. Mother!

Mrs. Gwyllim [*from the garden*]. My child?

Nelto. Hush! Didn't you see Owain was asleep? [*Leaning out of the window.*] Come in quick, mother, but don't wake Owain. He's asleep in the great parlour.

[*Sings*] *In the lone of the night the sexton lay dreaming,*
He turned him about: 'Who is sighing and screaming?'
'Oh help me out, Sexton, for pity, pity's sake!'
'Hush! hush! hush!
The dead must sleep sound and never wake.'

A shimmer of wings went over the sky,
A murmur of strings: 'Oh, pass me not by!'
—The poor mother wants to get out—

'Oh come, help me soon!'
But the angels harp on 'twixt the earth and the moon.

[MRS. GWYLLIM *comes in.*

Shonnin. So you've been to the parson, mother.

Nelto. Well, what did he say?

Mrs. Gwyllim. He said I must have patience.

Nelto. Patience! The fool!

Mrs. Gwyllim. I have had patience for one and twenty years.

Shonnin. Did he say nothing else?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Yes. He said that Holy Matrimony is God's ordinance, and that a good wife by her meek and pious conversation should reclaim an erring husband.

Nelto. Erring! That's good.

Shonnin. He cannot know—

Mrs. Gwyllim. What is there all the parish does not know? But Mr. Gwyllim is a Welshman; he speaks their own language, and drinks with them at their alehouses. Besides, the Vicar says he is a public benefactor. This lighthouse of his on Craig y Gwr will not only put money into his pocket, which they hope will overflow into theirs, but it will bring traffic to Porth Davrarch.

Nelto. The coward! I feared he'd never dare to stir a finger against a Gwyllim.

Mrs. Gwyllim. I was a fool to go to him. I'd not

have gone if there'd been anyone else to go to. But who do I know except Mr. Gwyllim's companions? The Vicar was my last hope, and now he's failed me. O look, look! Your father's in the garden. He's coming in. What can be the matter?

Nelto. Something. He's shaking his fist.

Shonnin. In a black rage. But never mind, mother; it's me he's angry with, not you.

Mrs. Gwyllim. You? O Shonnin, what have you been doing? Stop here; you must. I'll go and meet him. You'll only make it worse if you come.

Nelto. Wait, mother, I'll come with you.

Mrs. Gwyllim. No; not for worlds. He's coming up.

Gwyllim [*without*]. Mrs. Gwyllim!

Mrs. Gwyllim. He might take the baby and fling her down stairs, as he did Owain, and make a cripple of her, as he did of Owain. No—no—

Gwyllim [*appearing in the doorway*]. Mrs. Gwyllim!

SCENE II

The great parlour. MR. *and* MRS. GWYLLIM, OWAIN *in a wheeled chair by the window. The door leading into the inner room is half open, and* NELTO, *walking up and down there with the baby, continues to sing from time to time in a low voice, while her father is speaking.*

Nelto is singing:

In the dark underground the mother lay weeping;
Through the deep underground a devil was creeping.
'Hush, hush, hush!
What are you crying about?
Your gravestone is carven with cherubim faces,
Your pall is enwoven with silver laces.'

Gwyllim. Answer, you sullen slut! I'll make you answer.
What have you told the parson? I'll inform you
What I have told him: you're an unfaithful wife.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Unfaithful? You said that?

Gwyllim. Ay, so I did.

Provoke me, stare upon me with those worn
Lacklustre eyes ; I'll tell your lover's name
To who cares listen, tell the amorous story
Of certain letters—love-letters found cherished——

Nelto [*stands by the open door and sings loud*].

' O help me, dear angel, for pity, pity's sake,
My children have wept till their hearts are like to break.'
' The angels are fled and the sexton is sleeping,
And I am a devil, a devil from Hell.'

Gwyllim. Damn that girl ! I'd as soon keep a parrot,
Or a piping bullfinch. Sooner ; for their necks
Were easier wrung.
[*With assumed mildness.*] Come hither, Nelto *bach.*

[NELTO *comes in.*

Gwyllim [*savagely*]. I wish your neck was wrung !
Owain [*aside*]. Our dear Papa !

[NELTO *returns to the adjoining room.*

Gwyllim [*to* MRS. GWYLLIM]. What ! Are you crazed ?
You rear yourself against me ?
You mean to strive with me ? Conspire and whisper
Your corner treasons ?—So, you Bedlamite,
You thought my lawyer cousin at Porth Davrarch—
I know you went there, I know everything—
Would turn against me, turn against a Gwyllim

For your sake? Fool, damned fool! We hate each other,
We Gwyllims, in the family; outside it
We fight for't, back to back. You've tried the Law,
And that won't touch me. Then you try the Church—
Poor Parson Jones. Ha, ha!

Nelto is singing:

'Then help me out, devil, O help me, good devil!'
'A price must be paid to a spirit of evil,
I am thinking what price,' said the spirit from Hell.

Gwyllim. Now, do you listen,
You white-mouthed staring block. The country-side
Knows all my devil's tricks, knows 'em and likes 'em.
I'm salt and pepper to their market talk;
Besides, I'm one of them. They know I'm master
Here in this house and brook no huswife mistress;
And every man wishes himself the same.
The poor man who loves drink and wenches likes me
For being no better than himself; the other
In his hypocrite heart likes me for being worse.
I point the road to Heaven by contraries,
And certify him safely on it o' Sundays,
When soaped and shaven, shining from his tea
And bound for Chapel, plump he meets Squire Gwyllim
Drunk as a lord and driving straight to Hell.

Hell! Let 'em scare each other white with it.
You, you're a stranger. Not a man among them
Would flick a curse across me for your sake;
No, not for your sweet sake, you withered hag,
Mother of half a score of brats, they would not.
And now such gilded glorious hopes of me
They have conceived, because each ship that passes
Drops gold into my lighthouse!

Nelto is singing:

'The price shall be paid, the bargain is made.'
She has sworn him an oath, the coffin is broken,
The poor mother runs up the stair.

Gwyllim. What d'ye mean?
Damn you, attend, you are my wife—my wife;
My thing, my chattel. You dare move against me?
By God, I am amazed! For twenty years
You play at suffering Patience, weep and pray,
Now—understand; you might as well be quiet.
I choose to keep you. I have married you,
I choose to keep you, Mrs. Gwyllim, keep
You and my lawful children.

Owain [*aside*]. Slave-driver!
Else might you lack a lawful slave to torture.

Gwyllim. Eh, hunchback? Did I hear you muttering there?

[*To* MRS. GWYLLIM]. I fathom you! That crooked impotence,
That infirm devil, first fruit of our love,
You make your minister. He sits to count
With seeming-aimless, calculating eye
Sea-traffickers; the huge East Indiaman
With level range of topsails, dancing peaks
Of snow-white schooners, giddier than girls,
And every drudging slave-black barge that crawls
Deep-laden down the coast—all, all of them
My tributaries.

[*Pushes* OWAIN'S *chair away from the window.*

Nelto is singing:

'You have sworn me an oath, but where are the pledges?'
'My hood of white satin with Valenciennes edges,
The ring from my finger, the rose from my hair.'
'No, no, no,
But a tress of your beautiful hair.'

Gwyllim. Well, enough of counting,
You count and whisper her: 'A twelvemonth more
And he'll be rich. Now is the time to strike;
Find the fool Judge, the snivelling Advocate
That shall unyoke you, force him to disgorge
Money for all, his gold for us to enjoy
And beard him with.'

Owain. What if my mother asked
Merely her money?

Gwyllim [*striking him*]. Misbegotten toad!
[*To* MRS. GWYLLIM.] So you inform my children, I their father
Owe you my fortune? This indeed's a wife!
Some women can be loyal, though not loving;
But that's not you.
What, all my fortune yours?
Salt harvest of those uncompanioned combs
Where podded sea-weeds welter; such a rent
As waves that leapt them for a wager paid,
Or the lean tenantry of long-necked birds
Blackening along their crests—yes, they were yours.
But the lighthouse yonder, sparkling on Craig y Gwr,
The eye, the gem of the isle—who planted that?
Who schemed and laboured, wore the highroads out,
Scraped, mortgaged half the estate—

Owain [*aside*]. My mother brought him.

Gwyllim. Curse you, what did you say?

Mrs. Gwyllim. No, do not, Owain.
You must be happier—at least less wretched
Than I, if money interests you.

Gwyllim. So!
There's the dumb devil out of you at last.
Poor devil! Quite a stranger in a woman,

And posting back to Hell. The chattering sort,
The scolding, whining fiends inhabit women.
Of those you've seven apiece.
Answer me now.
Come, find a tongue. You're growing lunatic,
As mad as your mad daughter.

Mrs. Gwyllim. 'Tis like I am.

Gwyllim. Trust me, you're sane enough—your brain will serve
To set a scheming accusation forth
With cunning words, when 'tis against your husband.
White, treacherous vermin! Ay, 'twas very well
You found no gullible fool, but Lawyer Gwyllim.
I'll punish you for this. Not now, good madam,
You grow too legal; but to-night, to-night,
You shall repent the lawyer, shall repent
The parson; most of all, repent your sons
You hound upon my money.

Nelto is singing:

'My penknife of pearl for a last love-token
I gave my sweet William; then, how can I shear it?'
'No need,' said the devil; 'no need. I can tear it.'

Gwyllim [*to* OWAIN]. As for you,
Pernicious fool, what's wealth to you? Can money
Put sap into those withered legs, give life
To you, who just exist? Come now, what would you
Buy with my money? Clothes? You'd set them off

Handsomely. Horses? You've no knees to grip 'em.
Drink? It would kill you. I can take my drink,
Three bottles, like a man. Would you buy Love?
'Tis saleable. Old, hideous men can buy it—
Not you. Why, damn you, miserable wretch,
What satisfaction could you buy?

Owain. Revenge.

[GWYLLIM *laughs immoderately.*]

Gwyllim. Revenge, he says. O excellent! Revenge!
A chip o' the old block yet! There's Gwyllim blood
Even in that poor carcase.
You must wait,
Young Master Gwyllim, say some thirty years.
Your grandsire lived to ninety; so shall I,
And hale and hearty too. So treasure up
Your petty wrongs, your venomous hunchback spites,
Till you have money. You'll have time to gather
A goodly store of festering injuries
Before you bury me.

Nelto sings:

In the dead of the night, the moon shining——

Gwyllim [*looking into the adjoining room*]. Shall I not be obeyed?
Silence, you screech-owl! Ah, Shonnin is there!
Come out, boy. Tell your mother she's a fool
To make you worry me for money.

Mrs. Gwyllim. I?

[SHONNIN *comes in from adjoining room.*

Shonnin. No, sir, 'twas not my mother. She knows nothing.

I only wanted—mother, I'm seventeen—
It's time I somehow went into the world.

Gwyllim. Well, go. Your brother Richard went at your age.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Ah, you forget——

Gwyllim. Dick was blown overboard?
No, I remember it. He chose to go.
Too weak to bear a buffet from my fist
Or put an old man down, he thought to outface
The hurricane, that plucks with giant hand
Men from the close-hugged mast, as I should pluck
A caterpillar from a stalk and toss it
Carelessly forth; so does it fling them out
Amid the tumbling heaps of confused water
And the running foam. Useless to seek them there,
So never blame the captain.

Mrs. Gwyllim. May Heaven have mercy
On my poor—all of us!

Shonnin. Please hear me, sir.
Old Rhys the schoolmaster says—perhaps he has told you—
I am quick at books.

Gwyllim. Books!

Shonnin. There was a Scotchman staying with him not long ago, told me that at Edinburgh you can live for nothing, and get a University education so cheap the poorest people in Scotland send their sons there.

Gwyllim. The more fools they.

Shonnin. I should like to go there, sir.

Gwyllim. Well, go.

Shonnin. You don't mean——?

Gwyllim. To pay for you? No, my lad. When I've got money I shall have something better to do with it than to cram your soft head with book-learning. I never had more than the parson at Porth Davrarch could give me, and at your age I was earning my own living.

Shonnin. That's what I want to do.

Gwyllim. And what I mean you to do.

Shonnin. If you'd advance enough to keep me there, sir, till I could earn something by teaching, I'd pay you back, I would, upon my honour.

Gwyllim. Would you, upon your honour? I'm to advance money on the chance that when you get a wretched ushership you'll repay me. No, no, Master John, that girly pink and white of yours has made me half forget your age. It is high time you earned your own living, and as it happens I can find employment for you myself. Robert Roberts' son won't stay on the

lighthouse with him, the young fool ; you shall take his place there to-morrow.

Mrs. Gwyllim.
Shonnin. } The lighthouse !

Gwyllim. Yes, sure, and a good place too. Don't I spend half the night there for my own pleasure often enough ?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Shonnin is to live there with Robert Roberts ?

Gwyllim. Yes, indeed, Mrs. Gwyllim, that he shall ; and only wish that your fair-haired booby may turn out half the man that Roberts is. He's seen some life, he has. There's no man I love a drink with better. He knows his business too well to be drunk at his post, but he can carry liquor enough to set a man-o'-war's crew reeling. An excellent fellow, Robert Roberts.

Owain [*aside*]. Excellent ex-pirate !

Shonnin. Pray, sir, don't try to send me to the lighthouse, for I warn you I shan't go.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hush, Shonnin.

Owain. Bravo !

Gwyllim [*divesting himself of his coat and laying a gold watch with seals on the table.*] There's a rule in my family, John Gwyllim ; you mayn't have heard of it. When a son of mine is man enough to knock me

down, I'll give him some money to go out into the world with, but not before. Try, now, try. It's true your brother Richard couldn't do it, though he had twice your chest; but that was two years ago. I'm past sixty now; getting an old man, you think. [*Laughs and thrusts his fist into* SHONNIN'S *face.*] Come, knock me down, I say, and I'll give you fifty, a hundred pounds to-morrow. If you can't, why I knock you down, and to-morrow you go to the lighthouse, or to the devil, as you damn please. Come on. Why don't you come on? I'm making no defence.

Shonnin. Mother?

Gwyllim. Leave her alone. Strike me, boy. I bid you do it.

Shonnin. Then I will; with all my might, and may God increase it!

Owain. There is no God.

[SHONNIN *strikes his father.*

Gwyllim [*laughs*]. Again, boy, again. I'll give you three times. [SHONNIN *strikes him twice again.*

Gwyllim. That's the best you can do, is it? And you call yourself a man and want my money. I'll show you the difference between you and a man. [*Strikes* SHONNIN, *who falls, with his head against a piece of oak furniture.* MRS. GWYLLIM *rises, as though to go to him.*] Go and pick up her baby boy, and kiss the place

to make it well. [*She sits down.*] Am I never to have a man for a son? Well, indeed, I may have, but he'll be none of yours. As for this pretty thing [*touching* SHONNIN *with his foot*], it's plain he's your son; and plain too he's not mine.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Shame!

Gwyllim. Whose shame? It's just eighteen years since I first planned that lighthouse, and the young engineer, Ed——

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hush!

Gwyllim. So you don't like me to tell your children that Edward Liston was here eighteen years ago? [*Putting on his coat.*] Enough of this wrangling and jangling; I'll have no more of it. A pleasant thing truly, were I to be tied down to the company of an old withered shrewish wife and a pack of undutiful children. You, Shonnin, take the boat round to the bar for me when the tide serves. I shall go to the lighthouse this evening. Mrs. Gwyllim, bring me my supper in the library. Now mind, no damned treason while I'm away, or it'll be the worse for somebody.

[*Goes out.* NELTO *comes in slowly, carrying the baby, and singing. While singing she puts it down in an oak cradle by the fire, and goes to the door by which* GWYLLIM *has gone out.*]

Nelto sings:

In the dead of the night, the moon shining brightly,
From her tomb by the church the mother rose whitely.
By the bridge o'er the stream, up the path through the meadow,
Like a bird, like a gleam, through the wind, through the shadow,
She ran, while the devil looked out from her tomb.
He smiles 'twixt the cherubim faces and wings,
And winds her long hair round his finger for rings.
Boom! boom! boom!
From the tower in the silence there sounds the great bell.
'I am thinking what price,' said the devil from Hell.

Nelto. He's gone.

Owain. You're sure?

Nelto. I heard the stairs creak.

Owain. Look.

[*She opens the door, looks out and shuts it again, making a sign that no one is there.*

Mrs. Gwyllim. It was a lie, a foul remorseless lie,
And I accepted it. Children, 'tis false.
Will they believe him? On my soul he's mad.
You cannot think me such a castaway—
Children, you do not?

Nelto. Of course not, mother.

Shonnin. My dearest mother, no.

Owain. Well, for my part
I'm sorry 'tis not true. What, always faithful
To Caliban? O poor, poor, poor Miranda!

Mrs. Gwyllim. Owain? What do you say?

Nelto. 'Twas villainous
To wring a complete lie against yourself—

Mrs. Gwyllim. Not quite a lie; in saying that I wronged him;
I'll tell the entire truth. There was—I knew—
He spoke a name that once was dear to me.
'Twas a sad love and innocent of all
Save some few kisses and a world of tears.
The man I loved was married years ago;
Probably has forgotten me. One letter
I had of his, which in my foolishness
I wore upon my heart; and there he found it—
I mean your father. Well, God knows I've suffered.

Owain. Winged Ariel, fleeting Ariel I thought
Ever the one right lover for Miranda.
She should have spread milk-white transparent wings
And flitted with him to that delicate lair
I' the cowslip's bell.
O mother, pray forgive me!
If I talk lightly 'tis because I mean
You should not blush, for here indeed's no cause.

If there's a crime, a folly you should blush for,
'Tis to have married, loved then I suppose,
The monster we call father.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Loved him? I?
Alas! I never did. It's horrible
To speak such naked truths to you, our children;
I know, but cannot feel it, I'm degraded
By my much misery past proper feeling.

Owain. We never had it. Why should we pay toll
Of thought or speech to an injurious world
Which makes a slavery for us far profounder
Than that of slaves?

Nelto. They say that Love is blind.
If 'twas not Love, what other eyeless madness
On the wide earth could drive you—

Mrs. Gwyllim. Honour—Honour,
Blinder than Love and vacant as ribbed Death,
Honour, that heaven-white star which stoops from heaven
To play the Jack-o'-lantern—wayward Honour
And untoward Chance undid me. If much wrong
My grandsire did the Gwyllims, taking Ty Mawr,
It has been much avenged. I thought he loved me.
Oh, all might have been well, better than well,
Smooth as the ending of an old romance,
With sound of wedding-bells, and the ancient heirs

Come to their own again—but Gryffith Gwyllim
Played hero to it. Yet I thought he loved me.
Heaven be my witness I was not unworthy
Once to be loved : a young maid, innocent,
And fair beside. Out upon human folly,
Bids me remember beauty sorrow-changed !
As well some murdered ghost might make lament
The assassin stole a jewel.

Nelto. Had I beauty
And one defaced it, I should count that up
Among my bitterest wrongs.

Owain. Yet are there bitterer.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Much bitterer, Owain. You and I know that.

Nelto. O mother, think ! Have you not anywhere
Friends who would help us?

Mrs. Gwyllim. No. There's no one left.
I had so few. Mostly they're dead, and all
He in his cunning violence quarrelled with
Past reconcilement. I have got no friends.

Owain. The net is closely meshed ; yet surely, surely,
Did I not lie here a chained prisoner,
I'd find the means to tear it.
You, John Gwyllim,
What are you good for? Have you no man's blood
In your body, laid there at your mother's knee,

To tingle at a blow, to shoot you upright—
As I shall never be—and make you swear
There shall be vengeance, shall be liberty
For her, for all of us?
I talk foolishly.

Shonnin. I'm ready to do anything. Just tell me
What I can do.

Owain. Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing!
Anne's practically dead, Richard is dead,
I have been dead—when was my birthday?—dead
These twenty years. Die; for it's your turn next.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Don't say that, Owain.

Nelto. No, you've left me out.
It's my turn next, and I don't mean to die;
At least not die before I've lived. To die!
Oh, 'tis a shocking thing to die, die young,
Be suddenly thrust on cold, remorseless Death—
Poor Dick! Don't think of it—

Mrs. Gwyllim. I needs must think,
Anne, Richard, Shonnin now—yes, all my children
As by some hungry monster, one by one
Are plucked from out my bosom. Owain is left,
My poor, poor Owain left.

[*She approaches* OWAIN, *who motions her away.*

Owain. I cannot bear it.
When others weep they've leave to hide their tears.

Grant me so much of manhood. Come, come, Nelto,
Take me away—alone—

[NELTO *wheels his chair into the adjoining room.*

Mrs. Gwyllim. O my dear Shonnin,
What fatal freak was this? My heart's a stone,
Or I'd be sorry for it. So you'll go,
You too. Why pull down fate upon your head?
Anne's in a mad-house; you'll be in a dungeon,
With Roberts for a gaoler.

Shonnin. Don't fear that.
I'm not going to the lighthouse.

Mrs. Gwyllim. So you say.
We all say that sometimes: 'I will' or 'will not.'
'Tis empty arrogance. When the whip cracks
The slave falls into line, and does or does not
Just as his master chooses.

Shonnin. No, not always.
You are a woman, mother; I'm a man.

Mrs. Gwyllim. At seventeen, my beloved?

Shonnin. Yes, from to-day.
My father's made me one.

Mrs. Gwyllim. A man, a man!
You must be more not to fear Gryffith Gwyllim.

Shonnin. And I do fear him; know he has the strength
To strike me dead, the will too, could he do it
And keep the wind of the law.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Mine's a worse fear.
I fear not death—why should I?—but I fear
Him because he's himself.
Shonnin. I've that fear, too.
Mother, a man may fear, but being a man
He catches Fear by the throat, and says, 'Not thou
But I am master.' So has this pale Fear
Been dragged by the hair through half the bloody mire
Of glorious battlefields, and died 'neath laurels.
Do not start, mother; I'll not dream of glory;
All that I ask is common liberty.
Mrs. Gwyllim. You can't resist him. He could carry you
Easily, like a child.
Shonnin. Yes, if he caught me,
But he shall never do it; my plans are laid.
I just tried first—it seemed incredible
To be grudged a pittance when I know he squanders
Money, your money—Oh, it's shameful!
Mrs. Gwyllim. Mine?
I think 'twas called so. Come, tell me your projects.
Shonnin. The captain of the 'Wave' sails from Porth Davrarch
For Liverpool to-morrow. 'Tis a promise
I sail aboard her.
Mrs. Gwyllim. What, you go to sea!

You be a sailor too, when even Richard—
Richard—For God's sake! No, you shall not, Shonnin.
Listen; I forbid you.

Shonnin. Why, so the Captain would.
He holds me cheap as you do. Mother mine,
My plans are different. I'll to Manchester;
There, 'mid the flying shuttles and great wheels
That Fortune turns, to take my chance of Fortune.

Mrs. Gwyllim. My little Shonnin, he that loves his book,
A common mill-hand?

Shonnin. Yes, and a scholar, too.
I shall live hard, save half my earnings, spend
Nothing on pleasure-seeking. So I'll save
Enough to go to Edinburgh.

Mrs. Gwyllim. No, never.
You never will. Why, it's the maddest plan.
You'll simply starve and die there, and your mother,
Your wretched mother won't even know you're dead.

Shonnin. Tell me a better plan.

Mrs. Gwyllim. She'll only guess it.
The're dreams enough to haunt the roaring nights
And bring ill tidings, when the dark's all voices;
A clamour as of lamentable things
Climbing up from the shore and swooping seawards,
All clashing round Ty Mawr. Horrible voices,

Groans, sudden cries, and long, long doleful stories
The ear pursues, waiting the imminent words,
Until they whine and witter down to nothing.
Yet they're distinct enough. There's one that whispers,
Waving the ghost-white curtains. 'Hush! I've seen it.
It's hanging now deep down amid the seaweed.
It sways in the dim water like the seaweed,
The hair and long lax limbs; the tranquil fishes
Swim under, feed, and swim.' And that was Richard.

Shonnin. O mother, don't! Think he's in Heaven.

Mrs. Gwyllim. He may be.
He's drowned, at any rate. Another voice
Talks at the corner of the house. 'What! warm?
It's cold in the cell. Don't you remember her?
You used to hear her pitter-patter feet
On the passage floor, and open half awake
Your arms for the soft chill thing to creep into
And warm herself o' nights. It's cold in the cell.
I've seen her there. She's whimpering in the dark
Because she dares not scream. Her hair's cut short,
Her nails are grown. She's starved, unkempt, and ragged.
She has no mother.' That's my daughter Anne.

Shonnin. Mother, you are not yourself. These shocking fancies
Are themselves madness.

Mrs. Gwyllim. My lovely, delicate Anne!

Shonnin. 'Twas terror turned her brain—the daily terror
Of him. She's better far away, and doubtless
They're kind to her ; they surely must be kind
To your pretty Anne.

Mrs. Gwyllim. They may be ; but who knows ?
Shonnin, for my sake—see, I beg and pray you,
Don't leave me now. Indeed, I cannot bear it ;
I've borne so much. Shonnin, indeed, you know not
Just what you are to me. Dear, twice beloved ;
Dear child, and then—you'll never apprehend !—
My angel of consolation. Just one look,
One sinful look at that pure paradise
Some women walk in ; then the gate was closed.
The darkness and the anguish ! Then came you—
Flower of my soul ! You—son of very love ;
Because my heart was love, and all its blood,
Feeding your heart, fled through its thrilling pulses
In jubilant ministry ; for love is triumph
Even in the extreme of fate, and love is light
In death's gate and the darkness afterwards.
Well—that is past, long past. But you remain,
Flower of my heart. Shonnin my son, my best,
See how in my exceeding selfishness
I hang on you, implore, and supplicate
You will not, will not leave me.

Shonnin. My sweet mother,
What can I do? Consider; there's no choice.
I must escape, else be endungeoned yonder
At the lighthouse. Either way we're separated,
As well by one strait channel of stormy sea
As by a hundred miles.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Nay, not so far.
Sometimes you'd surely come. Oh, not so far,
For I should see your nightly vigilant flame
Through the dead hours when nothing seems alive
Except myself; see it through all the nights
I must keep watch to please his devilish humour.
Indeed, I want you there.

Shonnin. Mother, you are strange,
And different from yourself. You'd have me waste
My youth, my hopeful, all-containing youth
A vacant prisoner? Better to die.

Mrs. Gwyllim. A very little while; just a reprieve,
Then I'll have courage.

Shonnin. Courage, courage now!
You've had so much. Now comes the push of fate;
No other moment's good. Were I once captured
Escape were mere conjecture. Now at most
'Tis hazard, and that favourable. Mother,
I will return, I never will forget.
Do I not love you? Ay, but you want help,

What help is here for any of us? Away,
I'll surely find it. Dearest soul, take heart.
I'll write—

Mrs. Gwyllim. What use? I never get my letters.

Shonnin. At least you'll guess I'm working for you.
Who knows?
I may discover sudden stairs to fortune
In Manchester. Men once as poor as I
Walk the streets now, their pockets stuffed with gold.
Think of that, mother.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Oh, I'll think of it!
Mad boy, upon my word you make me smile
Who cannot weep! You any fish-wife cheats,
If the market-women give you gillyflowers,
Just for your *beaux yeux*!
Ay, some men grow rich,
But you're not one of them. The man, my Shonnin,
Born to be rich, makes of such bones as yours
Grist for his mill.

[NELTO *comes in from the adjoining room, leaving the door open.*

Shonnin. Well, mother, laugh at me,
But let me go.

Nelto. Mother, indeed he must;
Go anyhow, go anywhere. You cannot
Wish otherwise, I think.

Mrs. Gwyllim. No, I suppose not.
What can I find to wish? [*Stands at the window.*
How the tide eddies
Over the engulfed quicksand! I remember
Hearing of one who blundered on it by chance,
Taking it for firm land. He stood quite still
Shrieking for help; began to sink and struggled
Sank all the faster, so was quiet again,
Yet sank and shrieked and sank, then one wild horror
Of choking cries and battling arms, then nothing
To see but bubbles. The island's all one quicksand.
I sink, and sink—and live.

Nelto. And while there's life
There's hope, too.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hope?

Shonnin. I swear you shall have succour
If I'm alive. If not, I'm but your raven;
Out of your flock some bird of happier wing
Shall fly to fetch you comfort. Dearest mother,
Patience till then; wait you in patience, sister,
Your brothers won't forget.

Nelto. How wait in patience?
I doubt I've not a genius for it. Wait?
Had you said 'Fly!'

Shonnin. You'd be the very bird
Were you a boy.

Nelto. Sometimes a girl has wings.

Shonnin. A husband finds them for her. Find the husband.

Nelto. On Ynys yr Unigdra?

Mrs. Gwyllim. 'Tis impossible.
My daughters cannot marry. No honest men
Come to Ty Mawr.

Nelto. Is there no way but marriage?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Would that there were, my love! Alas, what other?
I fear you are too ignorant, too untaught
In the world's ways to teach. You've hands to scrub,
Yet none, I think, would use you for a servant,
Except your father.

Nelto. Mother, do you mean
That I'm to wither out my whole sweet youth
Here at Ty Mawr, waiting while indolent Fortune
Shuffles my brother's cards? Oh, never, never!
There's Lucy growing tall, there's little Gwen;
They can supply my place. They're young, they've time;
But I'm eighteen, next year nineteen, and next
Out of my teens. O mother, one grows old
So terribly soon, and youth—youth's all we've got,
We women! Don't you see I must go?

Shonnin. Where ?
How can you go ?
Mrs. Gwyllim. I would to God you could.
Have I not beat my brains a million times
Seeking some way for you ?
Nelto. But I have found it.
I might have gone last May. If he returns—
He swore he should return——
Mrs. Gwyllim. Who is this he ?
No gentleman, for never such comes hither.
Surely my Nelto has not given her heart——
Nelto. To a drunken quarryman, a scheming clerk,
Or any other Williams, Parry, or Jones
Foots this delectable island. No, my heart,
My heart's my own. Yet, 'tis a luxury
I can't afford.
Shonnin. Mother, don't waste your terrors.
Nelto fools seriously, yet never could be
Too serious to fool.
Nelto. Do you know this song ?

[*Sings*] *Winged Love's a rover,*
Where'er he may fly,
Young hearts must follow ;
Then kiss me good-bye.

Fleet Love, O sweet Love,
He came but for this—
Greeting and parting,
A smile and a kiss.

Shonnin. Why, the sailors sang it to death aboard the Italian ship that anchored in the bay last Spring. What of it?

Nelto. Do you remember meeting the sailors as we were coming from church one Sunday?

Shonnin. Yes, very well. They were bursting with admiration of our Nelto's beauty.

Nelto. And you were all bursting with laughter at their admiration. It was no laughing matter for me, though. Why, before that I had always believed you when you said I was ugly, for there's no true mirror but other people's eyes. However, the Captain was not there that day.

Mrs. Gwyllim. The Captain? What of him? Where did you meet him?

Nelto. On the shore. Not very often, but often enough.

Mrs. Gwyllim. What sort of man is he? Did he make you an offer?

Nelto. He is—handsome, I suppose. He offered—to take me away with him. You see, mother, he'd never seen Anne, and foreigners' notions of beauty must be

different from ours. He said I was too fine a girl and sang too sweetly to be buried alive in this horrible country.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Did he offer you marriage?

Nelto. He did not mention it. He told me he adored me, and that Italy was beautiful as Paradise.

Mrs. Gwyllim. But you did not go. Thank God for that!

Nelto. I liked him at first. I should have gone if he had not made love to me; that was intolerable. But, mother, other things become still more intolerable. If he comes again I shall go.

Mrs. Gwyllim. My child, for God's sake, hush! You don't know what you're talking about.

Nelto. I know. It means dishonour. Books tell one that.

Mrs. Gwyllim. My innocent child, my poor unhappy Nelto! You do not, do not know. Books cannot tell you—but enough of this. Your ignorance, your wretched home excuse you. My sweet child, you must promise me to put quite away from your mind this shocking memory, this—— Promise me.

Nelto. And if I promise you that, what can you promise me? Life, mother, life; or a kind of deadly existence, without the blessing of a grave? Could I choose any lot for myself more miserable than the lot you chose for yourself?

Shonnin. Shame, Nelto ! My mother gave up all for honour, and you would give up honour.

Nelto. A slave can have no honour.

Shonnin. If ever your damnable foreigner comes this way again, I'll ——

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hush, Shonnin ; let us hear no more on the subject. And Nelto will promise me [*putting her hands on Nelto's shoulders*], Nelto, you will promise me by all that's holy to forget——

Nelto. Never to forget you, my own, own mother. I'll promise nothing more.

[*The mother and daughter look at each other silently. Then* MRS. GWYLLIM *looses* NELTO *slowly, and, falling on her knees by the table, buries her face in her hands.*]

Mrs. Gwyllim. O merciful God !
How often have I prayed ; 'Look on our sufferings ;
See, Lord, our mortal griefs.' Thou wouldst not hear me.
Now must I pray ; 'Look Thou upon our sins.'
We are left too long in hell, our hearts grow hellish,
Immortal wrongs are heaped upon our souls.
See ; we grow wicked one by one ; I first,
Owain, this girl—we shudder at ourselves.
Save us, good Lord ! Have mercy on their souls,
Mercy——[*Her voice fails in sobs.* SHONNIN *and* NELTO *throw their arms round her.*]

SCENE III

The inner room. Two windows look out to sea, one across the bay to distant mountains. OWAIN *in his chair,* NELTO *mending clothes by the window.*

Nelto [*singing*].

Sleep we must, but when to slumber?
Every hour's too fair to choose it,
Morn of gold and eve of umber,
Silver night—Ah, who would lose it?
Honey's hid in every flow'r,
Joy in every sweet, sweet hour.

Sleep we shall, but first be weary,
Dance with hours of morning gladness,
Pillage noon nor chide the dreary
Hours that weave delightful madness,
Round the earth that's with us racing,
Sun and moon and meteors chasing;
Worn with journeys, white with dust,
Then we'll sleep—for sleep we must.

Owain. The boisterous Winter's long outstayed his term.

See how the powdered snow pricks out the lean
Anatomy of the hills, their toothed spines
And skeleton ribs ; colourless, lifeless, old,
Old as the hills.

Nelto. April—and then comes May.

Owain. I warrant the inheriting Spring blows a brave horn
Somewhere through flush green fields and sprinkled woods.
Stark Winter holds him out. Fierce cecity
Of the grey tyrant ! There's his grip on us
So long endured he thinks it must endure.
Madman ! 'Tis certain he must loose at last,
Then why not now ? 'Tis certain he must die ;
Let him die now—or live for ever.

Nelto. To-day
I took my summer clothes out of the closet ;
They're all blue mould.

Owain. What else do you expect ?
Everything moulders at Ty Mawr, ourselves
Included.

Shonnin [*coming in*]. Nelto, will you make my bundle ?
The 'Wave' goes out on the ebb to-morrow morning,
And I with her.

Nelto. But, O unlucky day !
The fishermen's boats from the other side the island
Are sailing out—see, one, two, three black sails.
Old Williams knocked a hole yesterday night
In our smaller boat ; so now on all Unigdra
There's just one craft, and that the one my father
Will take to Craig y Gwr.

Owain. What ? What do you say ?
The fishermen gone ? No other boats ?

Shonnin. That's bad.
I dare not meet my father. Will you go
To the bar to-night, then bring the boat to harbour ?
I will be there. Pray Heaven he may return
From the lighthouse early ! I must speed to gain
The port in time.

Nelto. O you are fleet enough !
Yes, you must go. But is it farewell for ever,
Old Shonnin ?

Shonnin. No, believe me I'll return.

Owain. When ?

Shonnin. When I have gained the power to help you.

Owain. Ah !

Shonnin. Come, Owain, man, wish me good luck for all.
I mayn't succeed, but if I fail, by Heaven
It shall not be because this Hell behind me,

Wherein you sit and suffer, 's unremembered.
Would it were you might make the attempt, not I !
But you being hindered, why the adventure's mine,
And God will surely—

Owain. Help. Ay, cry aloud !
Perchance the Almighty sleeps or He pursues
Some maned star, leaping prodigiously
Forth from a lair of suns. I'm sick of God.

Shonnin. Ill-omened words. Find better, as you love me—
I think you do—to speed me on this road.
Owain, your hand. I would you saw my heart ;
It cannot find the words. I know I know not
Half what you suffer. To mitigate your pain,
To save my mother, Nelto, all from bondage
In grey Ty Mawr, I'd give—what would I not ?
I'd give my heart, my life—

Owain. Would you give your soul ?

Shonnin. What do you mean ?

Owain. I mean that if my soul
Had legs to carry it, it should this night
Have rushed upon damnation. That for her sake,
Yours, mine, everyone's sake.

Shonnin [to NELTO]. What does he mean ?

Nelto. I cannot guess. Owain, how pale you look !
Shall we not leave you ? Will you sleep ?

Owain. For ever,
If so I could. Why did I say damnation?
The thing's a fraud; yet were it otherwise
I would encounter it. I say if I could walk,
Stand but six hours, reach anyhow the means,
Knife, bullet, poison—I would kill my father
Like a mad dog.

Shonnin. Hush, Owain, you would not.

Owain. I say I would. A dangerous lunatic!
His wickedness amounts to madness. She,
Our mother, holds him mad. Well, shut him up.

Nelto. No one would do it. Sober, yes or drunk,
He's sane enough in business.

Owain. Sane enough
In the head but mad at heart. No, yet not so;
Such madness mounts. He cannot estimate
Debit and credit here. He overdraws;
That's some men's mania. Were it but his money
He fancied inexhaustible, why then
They'd clap him in a cell with no more scruple
Than his poor victim Anne. But on human souls
He draws, on flesh and blood. The coward world
Protects such madmen, the obsequious Priest
Sets bogies up to fright into submission
Their recalcitrant slaves; God—His mysterious Will.
I have a God, a God to whom I appeal

Unawed, an essence above all modes, an element
Not to be dissolved in the limbec—I mean Justice.

Shonnin. Justice is my God too, for God is Justice,
And therefore—O, have done with argument!
Let devils argue on Free-will and Fate;
Fools on the ten commandments. You mean nothing,
I know, by talk like this, Nelto means nothing
By talk about the foreign fellow.

Nelto. I mean
Just what I said.

Owain. What now? What have you said?
Again the Italian? And you'll go? No, sister,
Not to dishonour. Think, you have a mother
To die of your disgrace.

Nelto. She cannot die.
She's cursed to live, and who may comfort her?
Owain, there's a mad hurry in my veins—
My father's blood—to-day 'tis mirth and music,
To-morrow 'tis what time and misery make it.
Oh, there's no comfort in me! Let me go;
I were better gone.

Owain. Shonnin, do you hear that?
How many years, supposing you successful,
Must this beleaguered city of souls hold out
Before there's hope of succour? Say, ten years,

Ten at the soonest. Why, that's far too late.
Mother'll be dead, Nelto be lost, dishonoured.

Shonnin. No ; I will not believe it.

Owain. Your beliefs
Are comfortable. David in ten years—
Where will he be ? Lucy's a patient creature ;
She'll wait and wait and wait, till she's transformed
From flesh to dull grey marble. For myself,
You may say to-morrow were too late, to-day
Alike too late. Yet even I have claims
Can righteously demand scope, satisfaction
For the intellectual being, sole surviving
Of all that should be life, that might have been
Abundant life, in this foul half-animate
Mis-shapen body. Look on me, John Gwyllim,
And ask yourself, what has this monster done—
Steeped in a woman's tears, red from the winepress
Of warm out-trampled hearts, what has he done
That he should live, and live to be the ruin,
The horror and despair of unhelped creatures
Crude Law and shameless Nature yield him ?

Shonnin. Nothing ;
But then I have done nothing to deserve
To be made a parricide.

Owain. What do you fear ?
Night after night, or morning after morning—

That varying hour's just his malignant way
To keep my mother watching, some one waiting
Sleepless upon the shore—night after night
I hear him stumbling up the stair half drunk,
Three-quarters drunk, and then I ask myself,
Does God work miracles, that this drunken man,
Walking yon dangerous shore, never mistakes?
Never sets foot upon that bottomless quicksand,
Which should he tread it—well, there were an end.
And the clear morn, lifting long lids of cloud
Over the sea, would laugh on a clean world.

Shonnin. Consider no such accident. The lamp
My mother trims in the casement is most visible
Even from the wet edge of the lowest tide.
The stretched sands the further side the river
Are solid enough, for all they look as slopped,
As slimy with the salt and slippery weed
As the hither perilous shore. The lantern waits him
Always on the bar, that side the river's mouth.
The bar! What boisterous shivering nights I've paced it!
Lain, too, in summer, under a yellow moon,
Soft on the fine sand, gathering small pink shells
Like sea-nymphs' finger nails. No more of that.
David must—

Owain. Do you think the lantern guides him
When he steers homewards?

Shonnin. That doubtless, and the lamp
High in Ty Mawr.

Owain. It were an easy thing—
And easier yet to close that single eye
Of light in dark Ty Mawr—an easy thing
To let your flitting lantern leap the river
And stop this side. If he should land this side,
Were it not dangerous, mortal dangerous?
The quicksand would say nothing.

Shonnin. Horrible!
How dare you, Owain, even in imagination
Caress these murderous—but I'm very simple
To take you seriously! When I turn murderer
I'll devise something rare. Your plan's absurd,
Impracticable.

Owain. Why impracticable?
Nothing of note was ever practicable
Till it was done. He who vouchsafes not Fortune
Her part in his game, has Fortune for his foe.
Pshaw! 'Tis beside the mark, since you are purposed
In your most sanctified selfishness to depart
Leaving us in our quicksand.

Shonnin. What I purpose
You are informed. This shall not be farewell,
Yet I were best begone. Did the master see me,
Who knows, this very night I were impounded
In the lighthouse? David must bring round the boat.

Nelto. I'll meet it on its return.

Shonnin. Thanks. That were best.
You have often been before ; he'll notice nothing.

[*Goes out.*

Owain. Shonnin, one moment, stay. He'll not, he's gone—
And still so much to urge ! I wanted judgement,
I was too violent. Yet an angel's tongue
Had not persuaded him. I might have touched
At least upon the difference, all the difference,
'Twould make to him. Oh, he would never heed !
Yet Nelto, you, I, anyone that knows
The metal of his mind, cannot expect
Success for him in a machine-made world,
Where men perforce work like machinery
Grinding against each other. He wants learning ;
The temperate atmosphere, the cloistered calm
Where learning flowers, were native to him.

Nelto. You know
Schoolmaster says were he but given the chance
He would achieve distinction.

Owain. Go, impress that—

Nelto. I cannot—and 'twere useless.

Owain. Right. At least
He will have freedom, he has hope. My Nelto,
This stiff-necked righteousness 'doth something smack,

Doth something grow to ' common selfishness.
Sooner than wear a stain, an importune
Discomfortable stain upon his soul,
He'll heave us to perdition. But consider,
Prejudice apart, how stands the real account?
This modern minotaur, half brute, half tyrant,
Who stands convicted out of his own mouth
Of devilish cruelties to man, beast, ay
To wife and children, whom he maims and tortures
For pleasure ; this mean plunderer of a woman,
This — what in every answering nerve you know
him—
Society protects. Society
That strings up starved wretches by the score
For paltry thefts, sends by the waggon-load
Poor whimpering boys and girls to load the gallows
With puny bones. Does the judge dream o' nights?
Does the worm Conscience wither in his bloom
The purple juryman? No ; yet if one should rid
The earth of this notorious old mad villain,
He were deemed blood-guilty. Did I do the deed
'Twould leave a snaky something in my soul
Not to be reasoned with, a venomous head
To stir and threat i' the dark ; yet—yet I'd do it,
And do it again. Once for the immediate good,
Twice for bare Justice, thrice for my revenge.

Revenge, revenge ! He, he 'twas huddled up
All appetites, all aims into that span,
Pressed in and welded them. What ! flesh and blood
Turn to hard steel ? Ay, that's your chemistry.
Wake Nelto ! Have I reasoned you to sleep,
Or are you praying for deliverance ? Wake,
Either way. Let us read. Find me the book
Of the wise Verulam, where he speaks well
About Revenge.

Nelto. Owain, of all our lives
Whose is the worst ? Whose the least valuable ?

Owain. Mine.

Nelto. But mine next.

Owain. Why yours ?

Nelto. Look at it, brother.
I do sometimes, and all's far too distinct,
Like the long coast before the rain—bare, cheerless,
Monotonous year, following monotonous year,
Myself at end of them, a body and soul
Too withered even for pity.

Owain. Yes—yes—yes.

Nelto. Well, I can't bear it. I choose exile, shame,
I know not what I choose, but 'tis life, life,
Not living burial. Yet I fear 'tis ugly
And miserable. O why mayn't one be happy ?
Owain, are you sure I never shall be happy ?

Owain. Sure.

Nelto. I want to be so much.

Owain. You cannot be.

A sailor's strumpet, flung at the first port
Into—Good God!

Nelto. So little makes me glad.
Fresh flowers, ripe strawberries, the first fine day
Set my blood capering. There in the brown dusk,
Under the orange moon, out of dim warmth
Music will flutter and fall, a crowded thrumming
Of mellow strings, laughter o'ertakes; the curve
Of the marbled quays and palaces hangs hushed
In a translucency, half sky, half sea.
The stars drown under them. Shall I not sing
To such music, laugh in such a—

Owain. You may laugh.
You'll not be happy.

Nelto. Shall I not? Why not?

Owain. Shame, horror of yourself, the strong remembrance
Of your mother, all your heart clings to—

Nelto. I know it.
To what will you drive me?

[*She goes to the bookshelf and passes her hand along the books, as though looking for one. Presently begins singing to herself:*

O wind that farest
Afar and barest
Beyond the streaming
Of storms the gleaming
Of one red star.

[*Takes down a book and opens it.*

Whichever way accursed?

[*Turns the leaves slowly, singing*:

Beyond the streaming
Of storms the gleaming—
The strong wind caught it,
The wild wind brought it
Out through the thunder
Of surf and under—]

[*Flings the book on to the table.*

Owain, I will do it.

Owain. You will do what?

Nelto. The thing you would have done.

Owain. Who asked you? Who?
Who set that in your book? Not I—not I!
There are many things I would have done. Be plain.
What do you mean?

Nelto. I mean the thing you mean.

Owain. Him? To— to—?

Nelto. Ay.

Owain. You'll swear that?

Nelto. I will do it.

Owain. By God, you'll not. You're jesting.

Nelto. Jesting? I?
Look at me, Owain.

Owain. Brave, splendid sister!
You'll do it. But no, by Heaven, you shall not dare!
You are a girl. No! Never drag this horror
Down to the eternal mansion of your soul.
'Twould take a man to bed with that o' nights
And say, 'We'll sleep:' to taste that in his meat
And still be hungry. If this deed be done
Let a man do it.

Nelto. Who? Where is the man?

Owain. David—or Lewis—

Nelto. Children! Shall we all wait?
David a fool too.

Owain. O that I were a man!

Nelto. You are and are not. Accept necessity,
And with few words.

Owain. It is not in the act.
'Twere easily accomplished—

Nelto. Show me how.

Owain. 'Tis the ugly horror climbing out of it.

Nelto. Let's to the core of the matter.
Here's my life,
Yourself have shown how ineluctably set
To misery and despair. Shall I for nothing
Endure much evil, or for sufficient cause,
And benefits arising?

Owain. Consider, Nelto—

Nelto. Enough considered. Here's your instrument:
Use it or lose it. What! Do you think that I—
I do not hate him too?

Owain. O rarely, rarely!

Nelto. How is the moon to-night?

Owain. At one o'clock
She's down. At three the tide sweeps round the bar.
Whoop over! Then you know in a trice it's up
Across the level.

Nelto. Well?

Owain. The shrimp-fishers
From the long sands the further side the stream
Sometimes, at slack tide, wade across the bar
At the river's mouth.

Nelto. It can be done.

Owain. 'Tis venturesome:
For should they linger till half tide they're caught.
They cannot cross again?

Nelto. If they're strong swimmers.

Owain. He cannot swim. A quicksand cuts them off
From shore, and the sea mounts upon the bar.

[*The door leading into the adjoining room moves slightly.*

Nelto. Ah! What's that?

Owain. Nothing. The door creaked.

Nelto. Is it open?

Owain. It was left ajar.

[NELTO, *who is kneeling by his chair, half rises.*

No, no—
The room is empty. Listen, Nelto. The bar
Runs level either side the river mouth,
The same straight sand, the same tide-trampled rocks
Bank from the sea. Might not a sober man,
Steering for an accustomed light—eh, sister?—
On a so cloud-enmeshed and wolf-dark planet
As ours will be ere morn—a sober man
Land on the dangerous side, and not discover
His error till too late? That is supposing
The light misplaced. To-night you carry it?

Nelto. Yes. He will not be sober.

Owain. Can you wade
Across the river?

Nelto. I have done it for sport.

Owain. What is to fear, should he discover in time,
But blows and curses? We get those every day
For nothing.

Nelto. What should I say?

Owain. Make an excuse.

Nelto. A lie?

Owain. Of course.

Nelto. I cannot.

Owain. Ah! you stick at lying?

Nelto. 'Twould be ridiculous. But what to say? I have no invention for excuses.

Owain. Say
You wearied waiting for him. Don't we all know
Patience is not your gift? Say that you waded
Across the river for sport, and, the tide rising,
Return became impossible. It will be.
Think of that, Nelto.

Nelto. I am not afraid.
He'll come about half tide. But if all goes well,
If he should land observing nothing—?

Owain. Let him.
When he's ashore, then quick into the boat,
Push out, push out for your life; don't look or listen;
Land where you will, and let the boat drift. Then
Come home. The quicksand covers all.

Nelto. If he—

Owain. In twenty paces he's in it, and, if not—
The vigilant tide will see to it.

Nelto. Horrible!

Owain. Ay, this may wear the loathed mask of murder:
Remember, it is Justice. 'Tis despair
For one man, brief despair, for the rest long hope.

Nelto. Yes ; but I—Oh, I'll go and perish with him !
I could not live to dream of it.

Owain. You die?

Nelto. Yes, I had rather.

Owain. But you shall not, Nelto ;
Not without me. Mine be the expiation,
If death be so. No, life be arbitrator,
Condemn or justify. Sister, unurged
Of me beat round the compass of this question.
When you decide, why, let it be decision,
Not inclination. Meanwhile our grand accomplice
Steals greyly down the shore.
Bring me his watch ;
It lies on the parlour-table. I'll reset it
Slow by a quarter, so there'll be less hazard
Of his return while the river's fordable.
Thus I, the first, move in our enterprise,
And thus will seal with devout hands a compact
That must attend your hand. The sin be mine
And the repentless sea's.
Bring me the watch.

[NELTO *opens the door into the next room, and sees* MRS. GWYLLIM *there.*

Nelto. Ah ! Mother !

Mrs. Gwyllim. The watch—give me the watch.

Nelto. The—the watch ?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Your father's. He sent me for it.

Nelto. [*Pointing to the table.*] It is there. [*Touching* MRS. GWYLLIM'S *hand.*] What's that. You've blood on your hand.

Owain. [*Calling.*] Bring me the watch.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Does it still bleed ? His food was not to his liking.
He broke his glass on my hand.

Nelto. Yes, Owain. [*Taking up the watch.*

Mrs. Gwyllim. [*Catching her hand.*] No—let me have it. [GWYLLIM *is heard shouting below stairs.*

Owain. Quick !

Nelto. Mother, for Shonnin's sake—

Owain. We must delay him.

[MRS. GWYLLIM *lets* NELTO *pass through to* OWAIN.

Owain. All explanations after. Damn the key !

[*Setting back the hands and reclosing it.*
So, Nelto ! There's my seal set to the bond.

[GWYLLIM *comes in.*

Gwyllim. You devil's drab, bring me my watch, I say !
My watch ! Look at the tide, you bat-eyed fool.
It's down from the bar. When it's below the rocks

No getting aboard dry-shod.
[*To* OWAIN *who holds up the watch.*] You've my watch?
Curse you, how dare you touch it?

Owain. I've used it, sir.
Only to seal a—something, like a Gwyllim.

Gwyllim. Letters? Who dares have letters in my house,
Except myself? I will not pay hard money
For senseless trash. I loathe your modern nonsense,
Newspapers and letters. I had none of them
When I was a boy.

Owain. To whom, sir, should I write?
Or who to me? This matter which I sealed
Was but a trifling jest, a bond for sport
'Twixt Nelto and myself.

Gwyllim. [*Putting on his watch.*] I must be off.
But look you, Owain, you devil, I mislike you.
You stuff your brain with books. The doddering fool
That owned Ty Mawr before, left you too many.
Bess shall make fuel of them.
Mrs. Gwyllim,
Your girl's dismissed. I'll have no maid who talks
Against her master. I've engaged Bess Owen
The hawker's daughter: she's the buxom fresh
Free-smiling lass for me. Sit up till I come,
Keep the lamp trimmed and have a foot-bath ready,

And the water warm. If you were fresh and buxom,
Not sallow, thin, hagged past the years you bear,
I would not spoil your bloom with nights of vigil.
Such service now befits you.
Let Shonnin come
By moonset to the bar, and take the boat
As usual to her moorings. Why do you stare
All of you on me? What's there strange in me?
One would suppose you—well, 'tis no great matter
If you do hate. A nest of unfanged serpents!
[*Turns to go out. To* MRS. GWYLLIM.] Follow me, you.

Nelto. [*To* OWAIN.] I too have sealed the bond.

SCENE IV

Night. A high wooden footbridge over the river. A long stretch of wet sand goes down to the sea. Beyond the distant fire of the lighthouse shows red. NELTO *comes towards the bridge from Ty Mawr, carrying an unlighted lantern.*

Nelto. Not to be thought of—think of anything else. Think Gabriello's waiting on the bridge.

[*Sings*] *Young hearts must follow*
Where'er he may fly ;
Ladylove, light-o'-love,
Kiss me good-bye.

What a smile he'll flash upon me ! Radiant. Bah ! I hate hot lips on my neck.

[*Sings*] *Love comes and goes,*
Hither and thither he flies,
Sleeps here in a rose,
Wakes there in your eyes.

Could I love no one ?
Somewhere to-night on this wide unknown earth,

That seems to heave with the innumerous breathing
Of her stilled inhabitant swarm, somewhere—No, never!
Farewell, lost love, for, oh, this night ends all,
Ere ever 'tis begun!
[*Climbing the steps of the bridge.*] Down slips the moon.
Broken and tarnished too? Now she hangs motionless
As 'twere amazed, in a silver strait of sky
Between the long black cloud and the long black sea;
The sea crawls like a snake.

[*Sings*]
In the dead of the night the children were weeping,
The mother heard that—
[*Catches sight of a seated figure on the top of the steps.*
A woman on the bridge?
My God! Who? Who? What does she here at this hour?
To turn were—No, by Heaven, I will not turn!

Mrs. Gwyllim. [*On the top of the steps. Rising.*] Ellen?

Nelto. [*Coming to the top of the steps.*] Mother! What are you doing here?

Mrs. Gwyllim. What are you doing?

Nelto. Hurrying to meet the boat, Pray let me pass.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Why does not Shonnin go? Is this girl's work?

Nelto. You know I often do it.
I am full as strong as he is.
Mrs. Gwyllim. Yet I say
You shall not.
Nelto. Mother, you speak very strangely.
This trouble about Shonnin—
Mrs. Gwyllim. Where's your lantern?
Perfectly dark? Why, girl, you ought to know
This is a dangerous shore.
Nelto. There's light enough.
Mother, go home. You've nothing on your head.
The uncivil wind scatters your silver hair
Like a lone cloud fleecing above the moon.
You should return. Think, Shonnin goes to night,
May even be gone. Bid him farewell.
Mrs. Gwyllim. No farewells.
I've had too many of them. He is not going.
[*Holding up a key.*] His bedroom door is fast.
Nelto. Ah! That's well thought of,
Very well done. But, mother, now you've told me,
Pray hasten home. The moon stoops to the sea,
I hear the mounting surge. Haste—let me go.
Why do you hold me?
Mrs. Gwyllim. Is your lamp well trimmed
In the lantern?
Nelto. Why delay me?

Mrs. Gwyllim. I do not.
I stop you.

Nelto. For God's sake! This is madness.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Give me that lantern. What! am I not your mother?
Shall I not be obeyed? Give me the lantern,
And go you home. I mean myself to meet
The boat to-night.
Yes, Nelto, I do know.
I am an eavesdropper—that's how I know it.

Nelto. You do? You mean to thwart us? Fatal, fond,
Unhappy woman! Ay, you will do nothing
Yourself to save yourself, to save your children!
We must all die to please you, go to Bedlam,
Be trodden in the mire—

Mrs. Gwyllim. Child, you are wrong.

Nelto. Pardon me, mother—Oh, forgive me, mother—
But in this purposed business of mine,
Which is wise, equitable, the only Justice
We are like to obtain, why will you thwart me? Go,
Go home, forget, be innocent—

Mrs. Gwyllim. To you
I say those words: my Ellen must be innocent.
The crime, if the imagination be a crime,
Is Owain's; I cannot clear him. The execution
Shall be mine only.

Nelto. Yours, mother? You?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Yes. I surprise you, like an unknown creature
Splitting from out a dry familiar shape.
I do surprise myself, for I am free;
The husk has split, out darts a winged life
And leaps on the wind. When I went forth to-night
I was yet undetermined. Girl, behold me!
Am I not changed? All's fallen from me now
But naked motherhood. What! Shall a hare
Turn on the red-jawed dogs, being a mother,
The unpitying lioness suckle her whelps
Smeared with her heart's blood, this one law be stamped
For ever on the imperishable stuff
Of our mortality, and I, I only
Forbidden to obey it? A bitter curse
Light on me if I do not. Give me the lantern.
I must save my children.

Nelto [*embracing her*]. Well said, oh, most well,
Dear mother! I must not weep. Pray you forgive me.
Yet do not intervene; make me your instrument.
Consider, all hangs on his not observing
The least unusual circumstance. Your presence
Sobers him, even by the unnatural hate
He bears towards you, and thrust thus strangely on him,
'Twould prick his observation.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Alas ! that's true.

Nelto. O me, your small soft arms ! In mine the muscles
Leap like a man's. When have you handled boats ?
Ours is a heavy one, and the gusty wind
Drives dead on shore. But 'twill be necessary
To push out immediately, lest he discover
The trap ere he's well in. You cannot do it.

Mrs. Gwyllim. What matter if I fail ? I shall but perish,
'Tis simple.

Nelto. No, your failure means our failure.
Never again could we attempt this business,
Once having failed. And mother, my dear mother,
Your children cannot lose you. Think of Owain,
Your little ones left to the hawker's girl
And her base kind.

Mrs. Gwyllim. You torture me—

Nelto. I speak truth.
Mine is the undertaking, or 'twere best
To abandon it. Resolve, ere the moon's rim
Grazes the sea.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Ellen, you are too young ;
You should be innocent—

Nelto. Never again
After this night. Come, mother, I am yours ;
Make me a wanton or an avenger.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Powers
That set my spirit to swing on such a thread
Over mere blackness, teach me now to guide it !

Nelto. Mother, the moon dips.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Go, my daughter, go !
And let these hands, these miserable hands,
Too weak to avenge my children, let them be
Yet strong enough to pull upon my head
God's everlasting judgement. All that weight
Fall on me only !

Nelto. Amen, so let it be,
If so it may be.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Farewell.

Nelto. I'd forgotten
Something of urgency. Haste to extinguish
The lamp in the parlour window, lest it guide him
Too well in the dark.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Better, I think, rekindle it
In the granary dormer.

Nelto. Good. To shift the light
About that distance, should serve very well
Our purpose.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hence, and may the black Heaven shield you !

[*Goes away in the direction of Ty Mawr, while* NELTO *descends the steps on the further side.*

Nelto [*sings*].

In the dead of the night, the moon shining brightly,
From her tomb by the church——

What's all that red
Awash on the oozed sand? Fool! 'Tis reflection
From the lighthouse fire. What! Is it different
To-night?

[*Sings*]

By the bridge o'er the stream, by the path up the meadow,
Like a bird, like a gleam, thro' the wind, thro' the shadow——

If he should scream out horribly?
I must hear and never help. O God! I could not,
I must return. I must——

[*Sings*] *Boom, boom, boom!*
From the tower in the silence there sounds the great bell.

Plumb drops the moon!
Drown not so fast! Wait for me—wait awhile.
[*Runs down the sands towards the sea.*

SCENE V

Night. The inner room. OWAIN *in his chair at the window looking towards the sea. His mother beside him. The curtains are drawn back and there is no light in the room except a candle on the ground.*

Mrs. Gwyllim. She'll be drowned.
Owain. Not so. She cannot be.
Mrs Gwyllim. Cannot?
He does not come. She's waiting all this while,
And the tide storming up. Oh, but this darkness!
Is that foam at the river's mouth? I'm sure by now
Great rushing surges rise like sheeted phantoms
Momently from the headland. But one sees nothing.
Owain. Enough; the lighthouse—
Mrs. Gwyllim. Ay, that glares at us.
Owain. And yon small stationary light—
Mrs. Gwyllim. So small!
What if he overlooked it? Landed there,
At the usual place? She's lost so.
Owain. No, no, mother!

Shall we not mark him? Shonnin must run down
And fetch her off with the boat.

Mrs. Gwyllim. But tell me, Owain,
What if he does not come?

Owain. Impossible.
He never yet delayed the night there.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Never!
These will-o'-the wisps, 'never,' 'impossible,'
Misguide men to their ruin. What if he did?
There's not another boat on the island.

Owain. None.
But mother, do not with distracted horrors
Flaw the firm texture of resolved minds.
Rather we should drug deep imagination,
Leaving a mere mechanic sense to observe
An unmeaning light, nor search the invisible
Behind it, even for facts; to see her yonder,
Alone on the bar, and—Vengeance on all sight
But eyesight! What do we see here that's fearful?
A night much less tempestuous than most
Of this mad season, darkness and two lights.
Ah, but another, as I live! Yes surely;
'Tis gone now, but I'd swear—quick, mother, quick!
Bring me the telescope.

Mrs. Gwyllim. His telescope?
It is forbidden, I dare not.

Owain. You forget
How much you dare to-night.

Mrs. Gwyllim. [*Laughing wildly.*] Oh, I'm a fool,
A very idiot! I will fetch it. [*Goes out.*]

Owain. Now,
Gwyllim, my devil has yours by the throat;
They tussle up and down. Shall's wager on them?
Hike a good devil! Yours is a tough grey fellow,
Yet will I back my pup—he bears a name,
A dreadful name, whose echoes roar of blood
Down the black galleries of bottomless Hell
To the unplumbed primal void.

[*To* MRS. GWYLLIM, *who re-enters with a telescope.*]
You have it? Good!
You have been speedy.

Mrs. Gwyllim. I have brought the night-glass.

[*Placing the telescope on a table between* OWAIN *and the window, and fumbling with it.*]
I cannot fix it.

Owain. Come, give it to me.
Your hand shakes like a leaf. Do you see the light?

Mrs. Gwyllim. No, I—I cannot see anything.

Owain. There!
I have it. Look! That's the boat right enough,
She ducks to the hurrying seas. Again 'tis lost,
Twinkles again.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hush! Do you hear that noise?
There—there—what can it be?

Owain. [*Listening.*] 'Tis Shonnin.
He's hammering on his bedroom door, poor fool,
Discreetly, thinking you'll go free him.

Mrs. Gwyllim. [*Sinking on the floor, and hiding her face in the couch.*] Shonnin!

Owain. You know his purpose. Well, if ours succeed——

Mrs. Gwyllim. Ah——

Owain. He's better where he is.
[*Looking out of the window.*] The wind
Sits on her quarter. She flies straight, too straight,
Can a drunkard hold her tiller? Asleep or drunk,
If but his hand be there, some instinct in it
Answers to wind and tide. Hell take his instinct!
We're in the balance now; this may prove weightier
Than all our conjurations.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hark! Again!
And louder—louder. Heavens! He'll raise the house.

Owain. David's his only neighbour; he's as fixed
As a rock when once abed.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Promise me, Owain,
Whatever happens, Shonnin shall know nothing
Of this—this——

Owain. Shonnin, I fear, has heard so much
He needs must guess the whole.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Not my part in it.
I'll hang for you, Owain, but not that——

Owain. Be sure
He shall know nothing of it. Look! Look, mother!
By heaven, he's keeping off! He'll hold right on
To the other side the river. Does he not mark
The light? What does it mean?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Nothing, I think.
He backs against the wind, lest it should push him
Too suddenly ashore.

Owain. Plague on this caution!

Mrs. Gwyllim. She swings her light aloft; see, it burns strongly,
He cannot overlook it. Hark! What's that?

Owain. The knocking's over. I hear nothing.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Hush!

Owain. Steps overhead! Now may a thousand devils——

[*The steps come downstairs and about the house. Shonnin is heard without, calling* '*Mother!*']

Mrs. Gwyllim [*blowing out the light and crouching down behind* OWAIN'S *chair*]. Ah—I knew it.

Shonnin [*coming into the outer room*]. Mother!

[*He pushes the door of the inner room and enters.*]

Is anyone here?

Why is it all so dark? I'm sure there's someone,
Though I cannot see. Who's there?
[*Gropes round, and takes hold of* OWAIN.]
You, Owain?

Owain. Shonnin? Is that you? You startled me. I was asleep.

Shonnin. But why the devil here?

Owain. I was disinclined for bed. At times this chair
Appears the easier.

Shonnin. Where can mother be?
She's nowhere in the house. Yon lamp's extinguished,
Yet he is not returned. Owain, she's gone.

Owain. Well? May she not walk abroad?

Shonnin. What, mother?
Alone on this dark night? No, surely, unless—
Owain, my mind misgives me. That countenance
She wore this evening—strange to all discourse,
Fixed, desperately brooding. Oh, I should have guessed
The meaning!

Owain. Why, what meaning?

Shonnin. Self-destruction.

Owain. Nonsense. You are a dreamer. Search again.
She's asleep somewhere.

Shonnin. Yes, I have had dreams,

Horrible dreams. I almost could believe
Ill things afoot to-night.

Owain. Go—you disturb me.

Shonnin. 'Tis superstition. Where are flint and steel?
Ay, here they are. That lamp must be re-kindled,
Else there'll be cruel doings on his return.

[*He goes into the outer room, and is heard walking about and striking a light. Presently he re-enters, with a lighted candle in his hand.*]

What does this mean? There is no lamp.

Owain. Go, fool!

Shonnin. Why is the light on the shore so strangely placed?
'Tis almost opposite. Speak, Owain, man!
Say I am mad, tell me you are a dream,
A murderous dream. If not, you are a murderer.

Owain. I am, and I am justified. Content you;
You will be innocent.

Shonnin. I intend to be.
Who else is here? Is it Nelto? O my God! [*Mrs.* Gwyllim *rises to her feet.*]
What are you doing here, mother? Why were you silent
When I came to seek you? Mother, answer me,
Don't look upon me thus; have pity on me—
Not pity, rather curse me, for on my soul
I do suspect you. Hate me for it, mother,

Only resolve my question. I am dull,
Dull, and a villain. Despise me, only swear,
My perfect gentle mother, make me an oath
By things religious, by the Almighty God
And the most merciful Christ, by Heaven's salvation
And all that angels wonder at—assure me
That you are innocent of the least knowledge
Of this unnatural crime.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Unnatural, Shonnin?
I was unnatural when I let this monster
Destroy my children. Yes, I watched him tamely.
A beast defends her young. Now that themselves
Defend themselves, though with an enforced violence,
I dare not thwart them. His blood be on his head,
And upon mine.

Shonnin. My mother! Merciful Heaven!

Mrs. Gwyllim. Would 'twere my brain conceived this retribution,
And Owain at his book! Would 'twere my hand
Held yonder beckoning light, my little Nelto
Asleep with her sisters. Would that I alone
Were guilty, and they innocent. That's my regret.

Shonnin. Mother! My God, all's whirling in my head
And my heart too. Oh, this is sleep-walking!
Either you sleep or I. Wake—understand.
'Tis murder that's about, and worse than murder,

Because, however we may reason, this man,
This miserable man, is yet our father,
Your husband.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Ay, these vacant syllables
Had once power over me. Their spell is broken.

Shonnin. I dreamed I saw you dead, dead and corrupting.
I wish it had been true.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Why would you leave me?
It was not for myself—I have endured
An Indian's torture. Ropes of steel will break
At length with the ounce too much. Why would you leave me?
You should not have—

Shonnin. A truce to all reproaches.
I have no leisure for them; I must be doing.
Had he not locked me in or David heard me
Ten minutes earlier—

Owain. It was David, was it?
Trust not in fools, not even in their folly.

Shonnin. Yet there is time to save him.

[*He reaches the door as* MRS. GWYLLIM *rushes to close it.*]

Owain. Stop, stop, Shonnin.
There is not time. There's surf in the river mouth.
You cannot cross it.

Shonnin. I will, if necessary.

Mrs. Gwyllim. A stronger swimmer could not. You
are cramped
If the water's cold.

Shonnin. A light's the thing most needed.

Owain. They have both the lanterns.

Shonnin [*opening the door*]. I'll go find a lamp
Instantly. [*To his mother who clings to him.*] Let me go.

Mrs. Gwyllim. You shall not go.
Or I'll go with you.

Shonnin. Mother, I'll not have you.
I cannot. No.
[*After a minute* MRS. GWYLLIM *looses him. He goes out.*]

Owain. Go then ! You are too late
To traverse our design so it do prosper ;
If not, why then his presence on the bar,
On the customary side were best for Nelto,
Safer for all of us.

Mrs. Gwyllim. I have lost my son.
His heart is changed. Whatever the event,
My penalty falls due. It was for his sake,
For all your sakes ; yet he'll not pardon me,
Not understand.

Owain. Shame ! Shame upon him then.
You always loved him best. O mother, mother,
I had most need of love, a thing so maimed
And disinherited !

Mrs. Gwyllim. My unhappy Owain,
Have I not loved you?

Owain. Yes, but not enough.
This night shuts up the passage of his heart
Against you? Well, some slight indifferent girl
Had done it to-morrow. I am yours unchangeably,
Yours only. This so-scorned detested deed
Knits up us two in an eternal friendship
Death can alone disjoin. You'll love me best,
Mother, me best?

Mrs. Gwyllim. My child, indeed I love you,
Always have loved and shall—but what I shall do
After to-night's not thinkable. Oh, this night
Opened like an abyss! We toppled down it,
And still we fall, whirling upon ourselves,
Unguiding and unguided, spinning down
An infinite blackness to an uncharted bottom.
Talk not of what we shall be when we've touched it.

Owain. I am too much, it seems, my father's son,
To be well loved; yet were I not so much,
Your wrongs had never been avenged upon him,
As soon as they may be—Ah! they shall be. See
He's round—he's round! There—there! his light
Flying this way.

Mrs. Gwyllim. He's not yet in, not landed.
Look! At the garden-gate—

Owain. Shonnin with a lamp.
What is it? Where did he find it?
Mrs. Gwyllim. A small lamp
In a wooden frame hangs on the cellar stairs.
He's thought of it.
Owain. A feeble flame enough,
Invisible at a distance, thank our fortune.
Stars of the starless night, in your blind courses
At length ye fight for us! Running like a hare.
Run, lad! We are before you.
Mrs. Gwyllim. Now Heaven grant
He may not attempt the river!
Owain. Oh, he'll not.
Shonnin's no dare-devil; don't consider it.
See, see, he's caught! I know as though 'twere noonday,
His sail's down; now he's pushing quietly in.
The light moves slow, damnation slow. Come, hurry!
Don't keep us all night on the gridiron. Look,
Mother—you are not looking.
Mrs. Gwyllim. I cannot look.
O—O me!
Owain. He'll land in another moment.
Nelto has met him: which is her lantern now?
Mrs. Gwyllim. Poor girl—poor wretch! I know not what to wish,
And pray we dare not.

Owain. They oscillate together.
One's moving now. Right! Coming across the bar.
Why does it stop? Push off, Nelto, push off!
Ay, now he moves again. The telescope!
[*Looking through it.*] The light's in his hand doubtless,
and lurches with him.
I know his gait o' nights. Plague seize you, girl,
Why do you loiter? Haste! You should be away.
Mrs. Gwyllim. The tide sets up the bar, the wind's
against her,
And she—she's but a girl.
Owain. Ay, but a brave one,
And pulls a good oar. What! Do you suppose,
Were I other than I am, I'd leave her to it?
Would we were face to face, my knife in his heart,
Come after it what might come!
Bravely, Nelto!
She's under weigh at last. Pull for your life!
[*Throws himself back in his chair.*]
Our part is now accomplished. What remains
Let the inconscient sea, the accustomed tide
Hold to its issue.
Mrs. Gwyllim [*hiding her face*]. Oh! Oh! horri-
ble—
Merciful God!
Owain. What is it?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Did you hear nothing?

Owain. No, not a sound.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Then 'twas my haunted fancy.

Owain. The light on the sand—Mother, do you see it?

Mrs. Gwyllim. No.

Owain. It has disappeared. That means—

Mrs. Gwyllim. He's sinking—
Down, down, down to the bottomless pit,
And our souls with him.

Owain. Do you understand
What the boat's doing?

Mrs. Gwyllim. It returns.

Owain. Returns?
Now divination fails and rife conjecture
Falls barren. Yet 'tis true.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Owain, that sound
I seemed to hear—what if it were a sound,
A hideous outcry, audible a moment
Even here?

Owain. Well—if it were? Infernal powers!
She is ashore. Yonder her light comes flitting
Over the bar. Oh, this is unbound madness!
It can't be Nelto, 'tis a Will-o'-the-wisp,
Or God knows who.

Mrs. Gwyllim. 'Tis she. An hour or more

Have we not watched her? She has a heart of flesh,
Ears has she not? How if, with scream on scream,
His agony pursued her? She's no monster.
She's gone to his assistance.

Owain. His assistance?

Mrs. Gwyllim. See, the light stops.

Owain. Ay, where his disappeared.
She can't assist him, oh, that's manifest.
Nelto is reasonable. The thing's not possible
For her unaided—would she were at sea,
Miles out in a gale—'twere better—

Mrs. Gwyllim. What can we do?

Owain. Nothing—we cannot reach her. Nay, she's safe.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Where's Shonnin?

Owain. [*Looking through the telescope.*] His lamp must be extinguished;
I cannot find—yes, on the opposite shore
I see it. It moves—and now is stationary.
The river mouth's impassable. He sees that.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Heaven send he may! Yet would he were across it!

[*A silence.*] Her light—it reddens, fades, and now 'tis gone. [OWAIN *searches with the telescope.*
You cannot find it?

Owain. Shonnin still seems yonder.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Seems—Ay, but is he? And Ellen?
Where is she?

Owain. Wait, mother—stay. The merest accident
May quench a light—they'll soon be coming home.
However, 'tis we are helpless.

Mrs. Gwyllim. O my God!
Why do I call on God? Let me call rather
On potencies of Hell, for they do owe us
Protection on their errands.

[*There is again a silence.*] Listen! The tide.
It has swirled about the bar; now half the quicksand
Is covered with long shallow crawling waves,
And swift as fire the thin pools run and deepen
On the other side, ankle-deep, knee-deep, waist-deep—
Do I need mine eyes? Have not my ears been filled
These twenty years with the sea's sound? I know
To a hair's-breadth where it is. Find me his light.

Owain. [*Looking.*] I have found it. Ah! This
moment it is gone.

Mrs. Gwyllim. The tide o'er-runs it. Shonnin is not
there.
I'll to the cottages and rouse—

Owain. Rouse no one,
'Twould but endanger us. 'Tis very like
They are in the boat, both of them safe enough,
Waiting for the flood tide.

Mrs. Gwyllim. I have no time
For smooth conjecture or slow-footed reason.
I must away, discover, know, do something,
Do something instantly. [*Going out.*

Owain. Do something? What?
We can do nothing.

SCENE VI

The same. The grey light of dawn coming in through the windows.

Owain. The day. Wherefore the day?
Rather perpetual suspensive night
Cover Ty Mawr. But still the rolling earth
Pushes her giant shoulder towards the sun,
And myriad eyes of myriad living things
Begin to shine expecting it.
I'll not look.
The dark sea drinks the greyness of the sky,
Then all's one wan immensity. What else?
What shall day show or not show? Let me cease
To think, for if I think my whole cramped mind,
Which yesterday harboured the universe,
Is packed to bursting with one thought, is nothing
Except that monstrous thought.
Had someone told me
Yesterday: By to-morrow he'll be dead,
And you will wish it yesterday once more,

I had merely laughed. But now, but now, if prayer
Could anything, my soul how I would pray
To have him back again, that loathed tyrant,
Bolting out venomous insults, swollen with fury
And unappeased malice ! To have him back !
So he would heave this nightmare from my heart.
Shonnin, Nelto, are dead? Impossible !
Would I could waken ! Oh, this hideous anguish
Must somehow end ! My heart, my brain will burst.
No, it must be endured. Come, be a man ;
For there's my mother's step on the garden-walk.
It hastens, yet methinks 'tis deeply loaded
With an assured calamity.

[*Enter* MRS. GWYLLIM, *her skirts draggled with sand and water.*

Well, mother?

Mrs. Gwyllim. [*Showing a small shawl, dripping wet.*
Nothing but this.

Owain. Nelto's. Where did you find it?

Mrs. Gwyllim. Just opposite, on the shore. I called old Williams
To bring his lantern.

Owain. Ay, 'tis Nelto's shawl.

Mrs. Gwyllim. What does that prove? Why, one lets drop a shawl
Easily.

Not a word? You who've so many

Smooth and ingenious words will spare not one
To hold me from despair? You'd pity me
Did you but guess what an eternity
I have been searching for them.

Owain. I've been waiting
The same eternity.

Mrs. Gwyllim. See, see! I ve waded
Waist-deep and shrieked, holloaing against the wind
Till my throat cracked its strings; yet nothing answered
Save the hoarse sea-bird.
What of that? The wind
Blew back my voice. Shall one despair so soon?
The comfortable light brings hope. Look yonder,
A patch of solid darkness gathers in
From the universal grey. I've watched it shaping—
Clearly the boat now. 'Twere an easy thing,
Old Williams says, the boat being water-logged,
Just there, in such a tide to get aground.
They are waiting for the day.

Owain. Old Williams thinks so?
His eyesight fails. I would mine own confirmed him.
No, I'm not cruel. Mother, let's brace our hearts,
For now's the pivot moment that must swing us
From an unfixed suspense to a fixed knowledge
Less miserable however based with horror.
Mother, I think that boat is empty.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Look!
To me it seems there's somewhat lying there.
They sleep perhaps.

[OWAIN *looks at the boat through the telescope.*

Mrs. Gwyllim. Well?

[*He turns it about, still looking.*] What did you see?

Owain. There's something floating.

Mrs. Gwyllim. What? Who?

Owain. No one.
'Tis something small—a lamp, I think.

Mrs. Gwyllim. But the boat,
Look in the boat.

Owain. I have.

Mrs. Gwyllim. What did you see.

Owain. I saw the sail.

Mrs. Gwyllim. Nothing besides?

Owain. No, nothing.

Mrs. Gwyllim. There's someone lying under it?

Owain. No, no one.

Mrs. Gwyllim. [*Taking the telescope.*] You are mistaken, you must be mistaken,
For if they are not in the boat, where can they be?
I have looked and looked, there's not a possible place
But I have searched.

[*Looks through the telescope, then turns away.*

There's something in my eyes,
My hand trembles. Do you look again.

Owain. O mother!

Mrs. Gwyllim. Where are my children, if they are not there?
They cannot both be—Owain, where are they?

Owain. [*Makes a gesture towards the sea.*] Mother,
May God have mercy on us!

Mrs. Gwyllim. No, not both,
Not both! She's somewhere in the house. Come, Ellen!
She is afraid to come. Come, Nelto, Nelto!
Shonnin, my heart's adored, Shonnin, my love,
Do not be angry with me, answer, Shonnin,
Shonnin! Not dead—not dead!

Owain. O hush—hush—hush.

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aeromancy etc

BY MARGARET L. WOODS

ELKIN MATHEWS' SHILLING GARLAND

AËROMANCY

AËROMANCY

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

MARGARET L. WOODS

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET
1896

TO

HARRY & MABEL

Three of the following poems have already appeared: "An April Song," in the Pelican, *and in a small volume of songs printed by Mr. Daniel, of Worcester House, Oxford; "The Mariner's Sleep by the Sea," in the* Pageant; *"March Thoughts from England," in the* English Illustrated Magazine.

AËROMANCY

I

The watchers in the everlasting towers,
Blind watchers of bright heaven, the bells who own
No changing years, but the unchanging hours—

Listen! They strike: a sinister monotone
Deep as all time. The same sound and who hears
Could be the same, did she not hear alone.

Those iron tongues have portioned out our years
Indifferently, with fateful rumours blown
About the solemn spires and aëry tiers

Of clustered pinnacles, and far unknown
Utterance that communes with the void. It fills
The valley broadening round their ancient throne,
Out to the edges of the violet hills.

II

Again that hour has struck, has dropped again
Into the gulf whence nothing may resurge,
Yet lo! with hollow iteration vain,

Itself the phantom and the thaumaturge,
The old long-dead inevitable hour
'Neath the emerging stars shall re-emerge.

Once heedlessly, as, ignorant of their power,
A wizard's child might hear such dooming spells
As make the dead to groan and brave men cower

Muttering hoarse prayers, so have I heard the bells.
Heard in the green hush of some long-drawn
bower,
Walks where a legendary shade compels

Day to its hue, where slow, with mirrored tower,
Garden and bridge that waver as it goes,
Cherwell to Isis bears its meadowy dower,

Strewn hawthorn petals, shatterings of the rose:
Serene as it could know their garland bright
Year after year renews, and even as those,

Brings to the winding wave its joyous freight
Of eager youth, to push adventurous prows
Far up its ancient ways with new delight,
Or dream old dreams under its haunted boughs.

III

How in yon high-walled garden has mine ear
Hung on their imminent voices, where the yew
Darkens above each grey majestic pier

Of the antique gate.
'Tis closed: none passes thro',
But in the unfooted mimic theatre
A fountain springs, scattering a lonely dew.

This was a child of music, some aver,
In olden time, and here men pressed around
Her throne of song. But one that lovèd her,

A student, who in pagan books had found
Strange lore, came once ghost-white with wrath and love,
And sat a little while upon the ground,

Hearing men whisper, seeing high above
The slim girl sing; till suddenly upright
He leapt, and shrieked out stammering words. The grove

Stood on the instant void, silence and night
Shrouded it up; nor was one left to show
How from its marble urn the fountain slight
Arose to plain the loves of long ago.

Time was this formal garden seemed our own,
So world-forgot and beautiful; the glow
Of its great flowers, the birds that as alone

Made sparkling sport upon the fountain's rim,
Its diamond drip into the pool, o'ergrown
With iris and pale reed, the skyey, slim

Poplar that still October turns to flame,
All was our own—the couchant monsters grim
Remember it: and the bells sound the same.

IV

From tower to tower eternally they call,
O'er the grey windings of the storied town,
Its large lawns, set in many a time-rich wall

And cool with broad tree-shadows. Floating down,
Everywhere have I listened to that chime.
Heard it high-laden with the summer crown

Of the lone reaches, heard it when the rime
Broidered the fretted stone and flung light lace
Of silver on the boughs, when winter's prime

Over the frozen flood in whirling race
Swept out and scattered wide our joyous crew,
Like birds that beat some viewless bound of space

On wheeling wings; till deep and deeper blue
Gathered on Oxford towers, and far away,
Ere up the stream in swinging line we flew,
Through the black trees burned out the crimson
day.

V

Hour after hour most ignorantly I heard.
A certain night, a warm and obscure night,
On a dim lawn I found the master-word.

Dawn and high day, wan visitings of light
Out of the haunting moon, come to the bells,
Heaven's horologe turns in their darkling sight.

Blind aëromancers, from their hollow cells
Float forth the eyeless ghosts of all hours dead,
With voices hidden as the sigh in shells.

The living hour leaps clangorous overhead
To living ears. A thin ethereal
Long sound pursues, the sweep of pinions spread,

Rushing they knew not whither, and the call
Of the oblivious ghosts, wild-whispering
To dust of unremembered burial.

But I have heard them, since with folded wing
One wandered ghost her former pathway found,
One blind, blind ghost, that knew not anything

Of change, but with her filmy hair enwound
Mine eyes, and closely murmuring, filled my sense
With the enchantment of that fading sound.

Ah, faded, gone! Yet had its effluence
Brooded about my soul and learned me more,
Had not ill-friending Chance scattered it hence,

Dispersing much that companied of yore
A spirit the world's business doth subdue
'To that it works in.' So that Hour forbore

To come again and whisper all she knew.
Young was she yet, and taught me first her own
Young secret. Hark! The ancient hours renew

Their solemn solitary undertone;
And I do hear them, yet as one who hears
A talk confusèd in a tongue half-known,

With hints of roaring battle, hopes and fears,
And festival and music and shrill play,
Of loves forgotten and forgotten tears;

And one grey murmur under arches grey—
The sigh of cloistral hours that fain would tell
Of how they stole and stole long lives away,
Issueless, void, alike, innumerable.

VI

I hear the incantation of the bells,
And since that Hour made me her neophyte,
I know what occult power within them dwells
To mock at Time's inviolable might.

A power to make invisible things seen,
And tumult calm and morning in dull night,
To set the day with stars, and like a screen

Rolled back, the curtain of a peopled stage,
Uplift the tenuous moment's painted scene
From Life's loud pageant and mute pilgrimage.

VII

Wherefore in ways familiar, I behold
Shapes that are not and voiceless greetings greet;
And often when the sullen midnight tolled

Makes sound of hurrying footsteps in the street,
I hear not these but other footsteps fall,
In the hush night a sound of many feet.

Away! Away! Ah, whither haste they all,
Echoing into the dark so crowdedly,
And scattering there, until the gradual

Silence resumes them? Yet her voices cry
'Away!' From shrine and sculptured pinnacle
The crownless images make chill reply.

VIII

The bells their loud unchanging task fulfil,
Beating upon the ear and on the brain
With a remindful resonance, until

Half could I wish their oracles again
Silent for me, as once they were; and yet
More than remembrance is it mortal pain

To watch that still, pursuing sea, whose fret
Washes our footsteps out, and one by one,
O'er everything we were and would regret,
Sweeps the smooth water of oblivion.

IX

(To R. B., 1894.)

Rather their incantation still sound on!
As on a certain morn, let them repeat
Fair hours and bring you back who both are gone.

There was a summer silence in the street,
Where half the shouldering gables caught the sun,
Your bloomy window fragrant in the heat.

Methought 'twas but a little way to run
To cross your threshold, then a shadowy space,
Reach the gay garden and yourself and one

Standing amid her flowers. In many a place
Does this white moon of May find multitude
Of flowers more beautiful than her own face:

What long glades pale with hawthorn, what bedewed
Soft slopes o'erspangled with the cowslip's sheen,
And nested primroses, a late lone brood!

Through nets of delicate shadow she hath seen
The sea-blue splendour of wild-hyacinths spread
Up Wytham woods, under the first fresh green;

O'er foamy orchards her young light is shed,
And flash of wilding blossom and the pride
Of country gardens, richly tapestried

With royal tulips sumptuously dyed,
Purple and gold and sanguine, striped and smeared,
Or pure in their keen colour as a bride

Is in her whiteness. Yet as oft she peered
Over the black tower, smiling silverly,
In yonder strip of city earth appeared

As crowded wealth of flowers as she might see
By ample lawns o'erflowed with ministrant air,
Or hollow coverts none explore save she.

For once it had your blithe and debonnair
And 'lucky-fingered' lady, eve and morn
To visit every bloom with happy care.

She was a votary of that later born
Young Muse, whom not less holy than the nine,
Some brown-haired Dryad bore to the unshorn

Bright god; who now a hierophant divine,
Comes treading with fair feet invisible,
Choosing herself the priestess and the shrine.

Such was that clear-eyed lady, who knew well
Out of the earth's dark homes to call up store
Of heaven-bright beauty, and a wafting smell

Sweeter than incense. All the bells restore,
Even to the noontide shadow where we read
Those ardent leaves, plucked from a heart's live core:

Flower-heart, whose burning petals wide dispread,
With scarlet ruin did enrich the mould,
Where still they glow, though long the flower is dead.

Tranquil and far, with murmur manifold,
On Autumn eves the bells their power resume,
Lone in the quiet sunset's waning gold.

They conjure up a green embowered room,
Where through the open casement there would swing
A sound of bells into the fire-lit gloom.

Oft have they chid me there, late lingering,
Warm in its lady's gracious atmosphere,
While easily as flames or fountains spring,

That sparkling spirit of yours threw out its clear
Lightnings of mirth, and the swift talk would flit
Flashing its wings through laughter everywhere.

How small a boon I brought you for your wit!
Only perchance some woodbine wreath of song,
Or hedgerow tale, dark though you smiled on it.

And even as I musing passed along
That street, you laid her to her near repose.
Hush! There are griefs that grief itself may
wrong.

Yet since I brought no garland such as blows
In dewy May, for her that loved the May,
From other fields, where Herb Remembrance
grows,

I bring the unsheaved harvest of the way;
Its purple leaves some dimmer dews immerse,
I pluck, and on your living breast I lay
The coronal of this Autumnal verse.

AN APRIL SONG

O come across the hillside, the April month is here,
The lamb-time, the lark-time, the child-time of the year.
The wren sings on the sallow,
The lark above the fallow,
The birds sing everywhere,
With whistle and with holloa
The labourers follow
The shining share,
And sing upon the hillside in the seed-time of the year.

O come into the hollow, for Eastertide is here,
And pale below the hillside the budding palms appear.
The silver buds a-blowing
Their yellow bloom are showing
To woo the bee;
The bee awhile yet drowses,
But the drunken moth carouses

All night upon the tree,
And dreams there in the dawning of the Spring-
time of the year.

O come into the woodland, the primroses are
here,
And down in the woodland beneath the grasses
sere,
As in a wide dominion,
How many a pretty minion
Of Spring to-day,
While warm the sunshine passes
Thro' the forest of the grasses
Awakes to play,
To sport there in the sun-time, the play-time of
the year.

O come across the hillside, for now the Spring
is here,
Come child with your laughter, your pretty
April cheer.
Your fantasy possesses
The airy wildernesses,
The shrill lark's dower,
The forest and the blossom,
The earth and in her bosom
The mouse's bower;
The sunlight and the starlight of the spring-
time of the year.

O come into the wide world, for you the Spring
is here,
The blue heaven is smiling, the young earth
carols clear.
Come happy heart to wonder,
Come eager hands to plunder
The wide world's store,
The meadow's golden glory,
The shining towers of story
On Dreamland's shore,
To reign there all the song-time, the child-time
of the year.

'THE MARINERS SLEEP BY THE SEA'

THE mariners sleep by the sea.
The wild wind comes up from the sea,
It wails round the tower, and it blows through
the grasses,
It scatters the sand o'er the graves where it
passes,
And the sound and the scent of the sea.

The white waves beat up from the shore,
They beat on the church by the shore,
They rush round the grave-stones aslant to the
leeward,
And the wall and the mariners' graves lying
seaward,
That are banked with the stones from the shore.

For the huge sea comes up in the storm,
Like a beast from the lair of the storm,
To claim with its ravenous leap and to mingle
The mariners' bones with the surf and the
shingle
That it rolls round the shore in the storm.

There is nothing beyond but the sky,
But the sea and the slow-moving sky,
Where a cloud from the grey lifts the gleam of its edges,
Where the foam flashes white from the shouldering ridges,
As they crowd on the uttermost sky.

The mariners sleep by the sea.
Far away there's a shrine by the sea ;
The pale women climb up the path to it slowly,
To pray to Our Lady of Storms ere they wholly
Despair of their men from the sea.

The children at play on the sand,
Where once from the shell-broidered sand
They would watch for the sails coming in from far places,
Are forgetting the ships and forgetting the faces
Lying here, lying hid in the sand.

When at night there's a seething of surf,
The grandames look out o'er the surf,
They reckon their dead and their long years of sadness,
And they shake their lean fists at the sea and its madness,
And curse the white fangs of the surf.

But the mariners sleep by the sea.
They hear not the sound of the sea,
Nor the hum from the church where the psalm
is uplifted,
Nor the crying of birds that above them are
drifted.
The mariners sleep by the sea.

MARCH THOUGHTS FROM ENGLAND

O THAT I were lying under the olives,
Lying alone among the anemones!
Shell-coloured blossoms they bloom there and scarlet,
Far under stretches of silver woodland,
Flame in the delicate shade of the olives.

O that I were lying under the olives!
Grey grows the thyme on the shadowless headland,
The long low headland, where white in the sunshine
The rocks run seaward. It seems suspended
Lone in an infinite gulf of azure.

There, were I lying under the olives,
Might I behold come following seaward,
Clear brown shapes in a world of sunshine,
A russet shepherd, his sheep too, russet.
Watch them wander the long grey headland
Out to the edge of the burning azure.

O that I were lying under the olives!
So should I see the far-off cities
Glittering low by the purple water,
Gleaming high on the purple mountain;
See where the road goes winding southward.
It passes the valleys of almond blossom,
Curves round the crag o'er the steep-hanging
orchards,
Where almond and peach are aflush 'mid the
olives—
Hardly the amethyst sea shines through them—
Over it cypress on solemn cypress
Lead to the lonely pilgrimage places.

O that I were dreaming under the olives!
Hearing alone on the sun-steeped headland
A crystalline wave, almost inaudible,
Steal round the shore; and thin, far off,
The shepherd's music. So did it sound
In fields Sicilian, Theocritus heard it,
Moschus and Bion piped it at noontide.

O that I were listening under the olives!
So should I hear behind in the woodland
The peasants talking. Either a woman,
A wrinkled grandame, stands in the sunshine,
Stirs the brown soil in an acre of violets—
Large odorous violets—and answers slowly
A child's swift babble; or else at noon
The labourers come. They rest in the shadow,
Eating their dinner of herbs, and are merry.

Soft speech Provençal under the olives!
Like a queen's raiment from days long perished,
Breathing aromas of old unremembered
Perfumes and shining in dust-covered places
With sudden hints of forgotten splendour—
So on the lips of the peasant his language,
His only now, the tongue of the peasant.

Would I were listening under the olives!
So should I see in an airy pageant
A proud chivalrous pomp sweep by me,
Hear in high courts the joyous ladies
Devising of Love in a world of lovers:
Hear the song of the Lion-hearted,
A deep-voiced song—and oh! perchance,
Ghostly and strange and sweet to madness,
Rudel sing the Lady of Tripoli.

ON THE DEATH OF AN INFANT

Alas! the little child is dead.
O sorrow for the downy head
That used to keep his mother's arm
And bosom warm,
And now the chilling earth instead
Must hide, for he is dead!

Mourn mothers, ye who know how sweet
They were, the blossom-coloured feet
That in our dusty pathways yet
No print had set,
So that the world will scarcely mark
Their little track into the dark.
Only for one the baby feet
Have left earth incomplete.

They coldly lie, but she before
The hearth will chafe them now no more,
Nor swing the boy to let him leap,
Who scarce could creep,
In dainty dance upon the floor:
For all his play-time's o'er.

Nor from that slumber where he lies
Shall he with blue half-wakened eyes,
Stir at her shadow o'er him thrown
Or rustling gown,
And dream a smile because her face
Flits through some visionary place.
She need no longer still her cries
Lest he unclose his eyes.

When last she wept—how many years
Ago it seems!—he dried her tears
With wandering touches velvet-sleek
Upon her cheek.
Now on his fragile breast she bows
Her shaken mouth and heavy brows,
And holds him fast, while he nor fears
Nor wonders at her tears.

Ye mothers, let her not alone
Make on this little dust her moan,
Be near with looks of love and touch
Not over-much
Her quivering grief with words, but wend
With her to-day made more than friend
By ancient mysteries of Earth,
By solemn pangs of death and birth,
Made consecrate, apart, unknown
Save unto you alone.

How lightly borne the little bier,
With all its flowers! And what is here,
That ye in long procession go,
Sombre and slow,
As who at famous obsequies
Mourn for a world bereaved? The wise
Will ask in wonder and recall
Some larger grief, or prodigal
Rich waste of Nature; year by year
Things born to disappear.

But here, within this narrow hearse
The mystery of the Universe
Doth house as kingly and secure
As vast and sure
As in the marble or the lead
That hold the world-subduing dead.
Its bare inscription doth contain
More than philosophers explain,
Or mightier poets can rehearse,
Making immortal verse.

And who is she with veilëd head?
She had a name, but now instead
Another. What she was before
She is no more,
Nor what she shall be. In her mind
By ways unknown she seems to wind,
Some endless lapse of time to tread
Slowly behind the dead.

Ay, this beyond her thought is true.
The seas have shaped their shores anew,
And stars in other courses roll
About the pole,
Since first this mourning way she went.
In Babylon she made lament,
And hath her ancient sorrow hid
Neath an Egyptian pyramid;
Yet shall through countries waste and new
The unchanging road pursue.

She mightier names and powers hath known,
For lilies on her pathway strown,
Out of the unsounded gulf of Heaven
The stars were given.
The deep of Earth's divine desire
Surged round her feet in argent fire,
Its passionate rumour, soft, immense,
Rose up to her through frankincense;
She took the moon and Hera's throne,
And Aphrodite's zone.

Through warring chaos, primal gloom,
Promethean shape she seems to loom,
Kindling her hearth with holier flame.
Around it came
Man that was beast, and where it burned
For strife he human order learned,
She first his shelter, she the nurse

Of all he is, for her the curse
Sprung where he made her blessings room—
The chain, the Titan's doom.

Adorn with flowers the darkling gate
Where things majestic pass, with state
Religious and with mourning eyes
Your ministries
Perform, ye mothers. Tell aloud
How that tbe glorious and the proud
The world's deep wave a moment ride
Like foam, and fade upon its tide.
Tell them that Life alone is great,
And Love and mortal Fate.

EVISA

THROUGH the rose-red chasms and the gorges
Of granite and porphyry,
The mountain river surges
And battles down to the sea,
Deep, deep out of sight,
Save where a flash of white
Sometimes leaps in the sun
And then is gone.

And a giant might shoot with an arrow,
Mile upon mile though it be,
Through the cloven mountain, the narrow
Sheer portal out to the sea.
The sea shines purple and blue,
Save where a sanguine hue
Melts in it under the shapes
Of the bare fantastic capes,
Coloured like Autumn eves,
Or a rose's inner leaves.
On the sea is a single skiff,
Above, 'twixt cliff and cliff,
A grey sea-eagle swings
Lone upon wide-spread wings.

SONG

Weep no more, for why should sorrow
  Spend a time too short for kisses?
Wilt thou weep because to-morrow
  Brings no hour so sweet as this is?
    O fond heart!
Soon 'tis fled and then we part.

Comes no hour so sweet as this is—
  Haste to harvest then such flow'rs
    All thine hours
Keep the fragrance of its kisses.

Time but treads the slow sun's measure,
  Lightning souls outstrip his fleetness,
Packing half a life-time's pleasure
  In a moment of completeness.
    Haste, O haste,
Ere such moments run to waste!

Soon shall come an hour for weeping,
  Days enough and long to spare
    For thy care,
And thy tears shall haunt thee sleeping.

Tears are longer than sweet laughter,
Yet they pass, and being ended,
Like a radiance following after
Stormy eves from suns descended,
So their rain
Fades into this light again.

THE CHILD ALONE

'Tis a pleasant thing to be free.
Nobody knows, nobody guesses
What I am doing, where I am straying.
"Where is Marjorie?" mother is saying.
Julie, who loves to sit making her dresses,
Says, "She is playing
Under the tree."

No—through the jungle Marjorie passes.
Sometimes I run, sometimes I stand
Still in a covert of high-waving grasses,
Over my head.
Wilderness ways, uninhabited land,
Lone I explore.
Hares in the grass, mice where I tread,
Look up and wonder;
Or the squirrel flashes
Red as he dashes
Over the leafy forest floor,
Then in the tree
High sits he
And mocks me under;
While all of them, all of them wonder, wonder
What I can be.

I was a child, a little child,
I am a happy creature wild.
I used to have to run or walk
As I was bid, be still or talk ;
To shun the wind or sun or show'r,
And then come in at such an hour.
I was a child, a little child,
I am a happy creature wild.

For see I wander like a deer
That sniffs about the furrowed bole
Of some great tree, or starts in fear
From every leaf that trembles near ;
Or neighing like a frolic foal
That prances in a field at play,
I gallop further on my way.
Sometimes a beech-mast tumbles thro' ;
I strip it daintily to find
The nut within its wooden rind,
And nibbling sit as squirrels do.
I was a child, a little child,
I am a happy creature wild.

Now, now again,
Reversing the spell,
Turning this plain
Little ring on my finger,
See I regain
Form of a child, spirit as well.
Yet I am free, no one can tell

Margie to haste, come and not linger.
Turn it again, thrice must it turn,
Thrice the sunlight flicker and burn
Deep in the heart of its single gem—
And see I ride from Jerusalem.

I am a knight; the paynim horde
Have felt the weight of this good sword
About the Sepulchre of Our Lord.

'Tis a sinister woodland deep and wide;
Alone I ride.
Saint Hubert scatter the demon breed!
Mary Mother be my guide!
Up the glade at rushing speed,
What comes shining, what comes sweeping?
'Tis a band of mailed men
And a lady passing fair,
Whom they carry to their den
Gleaming in her golden hair.
Ha! I come, like lightning leaping,
Thrust and hew mid caitiff clamour.
Beat the stubborn thorn-bush down!
Cleave and rend the bracken's crown!
Not a stalk be left upright!
Now they know the paynim's hammer,
Now they know King Richard's knight.

Turn, turn again,
Magical ring.

I am a Dane,
Cunning and brave,
A pirate king.
Swiftly I come over the wave.

The shore, the Saxon town I see.
The smoke hangs blue on roof and tree
At evening over the little town.
I hear the bells in the gray church tower.
With fire and sword at midnight hour
I mean to harry and burn it down.
But fierce as a wolf, as a raven wise,
I come at first in a deep disguise
To the little town.
And when I climb to the nursery yonder
They'll call me Marjorie, and wonder
Why I should want to run away
And be as any rabbit wild,
For I shall seem to be a child
Named Marjorie. What would they say
If they could know it was instead
A pirate that they put to bed?

'BESIDE THE DOOR'

Beside the door there stands a fountain,
And he who looks therein
Sees his own face that wont to smile so freshly
Look forth all changed and wan.

The lilac bushes and the gay laburnum
Were once a spreading forest high o'erhead,
And when in the white dew I marked my footsteps,
I said: 'They are alone.
No other wanderer ever came this way.'

Beside the door there stands a fountain,
And he who leans above
And speaks to it, hears his own voice make answer
Hollow and strange and sad.

In yonder field was wont to bloom a thorn-tree,
A tree with scarlet flowers;
And there a cuckoo cried as now he cries not,
Greeting the sun, greeting the moon,
When she rose red behind the frail abeles.

Beside the door there stands a fountain;
  But thou shalt see it not,
And though thou speak the fountain will not answer,
  With hollow tongue and sad.

And vainly have I sought to find the forest,
  And find the scarlet tree;
But thou shalt find them. Go, and then return,
Return and tell how all the unfooted pathways
Are white with dew, and deeper in the forest
  Dwells the enchanted bird.

Beside the door there stands a fountain,
  And he who looks therein
Sees his own face, that wont to smile so freshly,
  Look forth all changed and wan.

FINIS

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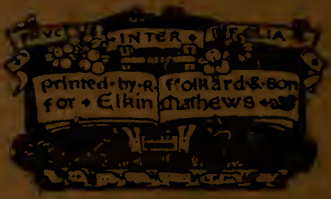

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